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TORONTO

The Wanderings of Rama

Prince of India

With Introduction, Notes, etc., by

Wallace Gandy

Author of "A Persian Hero," "In the Days of Lionheart," etc.

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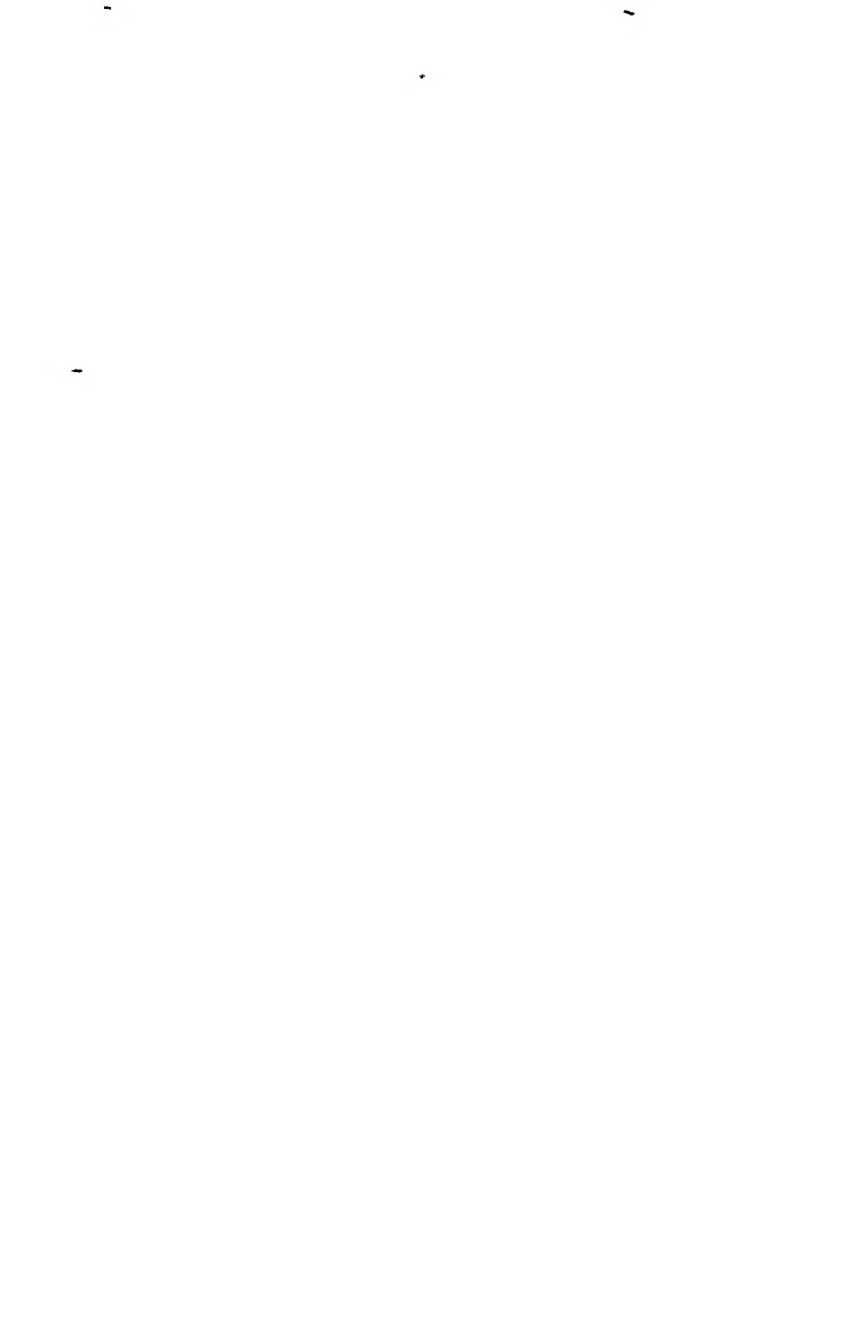
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INTRODUCTION.

RAMA is more than a hero in the estimation of the Hindus, and The Rama-Yana, or story of Rama's Wanderings, is more than a relation of wonderful happenings

Rama and his consort, Sita, are the ideals of manhood and womanhood to thousands of Hindus to-day, and many portions of the ancient writing are venerated and believed as Scriptures.

The subject of this great Indian epic dates back ten or twelve centuries B.C., and it affords a glimpse of the civilisation of so early a period. An anchorite named Valmiki, who lived near Allahabad about the beginning of the Christian era, is said to be the author of the Sanscrit manuscript, an extremely lengthy work, of which this version gives the salient events

The plot of the story is laid in Central and Southern India and centres round the rescue of Sita from the King of the Demons. From time to time the Gods intervene, but their efforts are restricted by the peculiar effect of the merits which even Demons were considered to lay up for themselves by means of penances and austerities.

Every devout Brahman believes that the God Vishnu—'the all-pervading spirit'—appears in an earthly form when his presence on earth is needed to remedy great evils. He has appeared, they believe, nine times, and the Hindus look forward to his tenth advent (which will be his last) when he will again restore purity to the whole world. It is believed

that Rama, the Prince of India, was in reality the God, Vishnu, at the seventh advent, and his task then was to rid Southern India of Demons, or Rakshas, as they were called

The story which follows shows how Rama restored the Golden Age to India.

W. G.

I

THE CITY OF BEAUTY AND PEACE.

*The Sacrifice of the Horse—The Anchorite's demand—
Slaying the Demons.*

THOUGH thrice ten centuries have sped, yet in their hearts men still cherish the memory of Ayodhya and of its truly noble ruler, Dasa-ratha. Learned in the highest scriptures, a glorious king, a man brave without peer, Dasa-ratha held sway over the empire of Oudh. His lineage was of the venerable race of the Sun and the people of his fair city loved him. He was ever faithful to his kingly duty and in graciousness he was unequalled. He conquered his foes by fearless fighting and controlled his mind by holy meditation. Wisely and well he ruled his people, recalling to men the oft-sung reign of Manu, the Father of his People.

The fair city of Ayodhya stood brave and proud upon the banks of a beautiful river which mirrored in its pellucid depths the towers, domes and turrets at whose foot its peaceful people dwelt in purity of soul, without envy or lying. All had cattle, and grain and gold, and the grip of poverty and the pangs of famine were unknown. None were beggars.

and none lived by fraud or theft; all were neighbourly.

The arms of Ayodhya's fair women were adorned with many bracelets, and round their necks hung threaded coins jingling sweetly at every step; in happy safety they decked their heads with garlands, and as they passed by, the pleasing scent of sandalwood delighted the senses

In this city, too, promises made were truly performed: men broke not their covenants and wives were faithful to their vows. In every house the altar flames rose, a sanctifying fire, and from every cottage men of pious poverty were given sustenance according to the instruction of Brahma. These Twice-born had subdued the evil passions which infest all men, desire of wealth, the feast and sloth. The holy Brahmans, the adepts, claimed respect of all. Three-quarters of his earthly life a Brahman spent in meditation; he stood pre-eminent, the instructor of kings, the scribe and doctor of law. Second in rank were the warriors and rulers. Husbandmen and merchants revered the priests and rulers and plied their trades—tillage, commerce, and the lending of money at interest

The lowly Sudras, toilers all, laboured and were proud of their work. Each of the four castes worshipped God and honoured guests with fitting ceremony as enjoined by holy writ. Such was the ruling of Oudh in the days of Dasa-ratha, resembling the governance of the earth by Manu when the early mists of time rolled over the face of the land

In battle his troops were ever victorious, fierce as flames and valiant, keeping tower and bulwark as the majestic lion keeps his lair

Nations far and near sent tribute, and Ayodhya, the unconquered, under the wise sway of Dasa-ratha, enjoyed fame as wide as the world

Mingling with the regard held by the citizens for the royal household there was a trace of sorrow, for the regal line seemed doomed to terminate in Dasa-ratha. He had three wives, named in order 10 of rank, Kausalya, Kaikeyi, and Sumitra, but, to the deep regret of all, there was no son to ascend the throne. 'Perhaps it is a sign of the anger of the gods,' was whispered, and at last it was resolved to offer the horse-sacrifice to propitiate them. Accordingly one of the king's horses was set free and allowed to wander at will throughout his dominions, a small guard travelling near to secure the sacrificial animal from molestation. On its return, preparations for the ceremony were completed, and amid great pomp 20 the ancient rites were performed on the banks of the river. As ordained in the Hindu scriptures, Queen Kausalya slew the horse, and spent the night on the ground of the sacrifice. Lastly came the distribution of costly gifts to the Brahmans, who blessed the King and prophesied that his prayer was about to be accepted.

Suddenly from out of the midst of the fire arose a huge maned beast, which approached the king, bearing a golden bowl. This beast was in reality 30 Vishnu, one of the gods who had descended to earth

in order to enter a human form. Pausing before Dasa-ratha, he directed him to share the liquid in the bowl among the three wives. The king obeyed. Kausalya, as the chief wife, drank one half, and the remainder was divided equally.

In time the long-desired sons were born. Queen Kausalya's son was Rama and he was endowed with a half the nature of the God Vishnu. To Kaikeya, Bharat was born, and to Sumitra, twins named
10 Lakshman and Satrugna. The four boys were placed in the charge of wise priests who taught them the precepts of religion, while skilful warriors taught them all the arts of war.

Thus their lives proceeded until one day, when Rama was about sixteen years old, the venerable priest, Viswamitra, came to the palace to seek aid from the king. The anchorite had been, for some time past, unable to devote himself to the practice of his holy austerities, owing to the malice of certain
20 Demons. Although the curse of Viswamitra itself would have been powerful enough to destroy them, he deemed it better that they should fall by the sword of a warrior. To this end he approached Dasa-ratha, who granted his boon even before it was asked. But when Viswamitra proceeded to request the aid of Rama, the brow of the aged father clouded and he hesitated, regretting that he had granted the boon. The rage of the seer was terrible: his anger seemed to shake the very earth as he threatened ruin upon
30 the trembling monarch. Fortunately, Vasishtha, the priest of the royal family, succeeded in calming

the old king's fears, assuring him that no harm could touch the young man while in Viswamitra's charge

Eventually Dasa-ratha consented, and Rama and Lakshman set out at the behest and under the guidance of the anchorite

From this day forward the two brothers were constant companions. They journeyed on foot with the holy man many miles. Coming to the banks of a river (the Gogra) Viswamitra taught Rama several 10 magical verses for protection against the fevers and fatigues to which travellers in that low-lying region often succumbed. Moreover, since the Demons were wily foes, the seer also granted Rama freedom from the risk of being taken by surprise. Scarcely any human beings were to be seen for miles, but in the woods from time to time they came across the solitary huts of hermits. Here they rested and were told many wonderful stories, after which they resumed their way through the trackless forests. Often they 20 heard the Demons in the dark forest and at one point a most terrific fight took place between Rama and an ogress. Rama twanged his bow-string and the ogress replied with terror-striking roars. When Viswamitra took up the noisy duel and roared louder still, the ogress in her fright loosened showers of stones and raised clouds of dust to discomfit the brothers. Numerous arrows, shot with lightning rapidity, turned aside the stones; and several shafts so severely wounded the ogress that she 30 changed her shape and became invisible. From time

to time Viśwamitra brought Rama new weapons of fearful power surpassing anything possessed by either celestial or demon warriors. The monster, although concealed, continued fighting the whole of the time, but soon she was to succumb to the skill of Rama. He had been accustomed to shooting by sound, that is, instead of aiming at a mark he was taught to judge the position of an animal in the brush-wood according to the rustling it created.

10 So in this way he harried the ogress and finally he was the victor. Now the three returned to the cities and Viśwamitra led the way towards Mithila, where could be seen a wonderful bow •

II.

THE BRAZEN BOW.

An Edict—Rudra's Bow—Rama's power.

THE monarch of Mithila wished to find a suitor for his lovely daughter, the Princess Sita. The royal Janaka, trusting that among the suitors would arrive the peerless prince whom destiny had chosen for his daughter, sent his edict far and wide over the realms of Ind and Cathay. 'Whoso would aspire to the matchless Sita's hand must bend the war-bow of her sire.'

Suitors came from the distant corners of the earth. The flower of the earth's manhood pressed for Sita's hand. Princes of high royal houses famous for warlike prowess, retired ashamed. Many princely warriors left Mithila abashed, for none could bend Janaka's bow.

In due time Rama with his brother, Lakshman was conducted by the anchorite who served their royal house, to Mithila's fair city. Janaka was surrounded by his lords and warriors, when the saintly Viswamitra was reverently led before the throne. Audience being granted, the royal seer spoke, fully proud of Dasa-ratha's sons 'O,

sovereign of Mithila's mighty land, grant, if it please thee, that thy bow of many marvels be shown to Rama, Dasá-ratha's first-born prince'

To his waiting officers Janaka gave the royal command, 'Bring forth the wondrous bow with its garlands and gold.' The lords repaired to the city's strongest hall where the treasured weapon was kept in a chariot of iron. Sturdy backs bent, and leading thongs pressed deeply into shoulders
10 as the car was drawn along. Every man a giant, yet was it a fearful task to draw the eight-wheeled iron chariot of the brazen bow. Into the presence of the king and his attendant tributary kings the great car lumbered with ponderous roll, and as it halted in the judgment hall, the nobles with one voice cried, 'Behold the bow of Mithila! Let it be shown to princely Rama, Dasa-ratha's righteous son.'

After which, Janaka addressed his honoured
20 visitors: 'Here is the bow. This deadly arc has been the chief treasure of my royal sires from bygone ages. Many mighty men of valour and chiefs of renown have essayed to bend it, but could not, O venerated sage! Rudra, my great ancestor, made even the gods to shrink in terror before his shining bow. Genii, that change their form, to baffle and to o'erthrow mankind, were naught availed of their skill before Rudra's bow. Demons, sworn enemies of the gods, have fallen to Rudra armed with his gleaming
30 bow. Man is but mortal, holy saint, and he shall but vainly grapple in the endeavour to string the

bow, compel the curve, and shoot the glinting arrow. Behold before thee, sainted man, the ancient bow of Janaka Cause Ayodhya's princes to behold it and pronounce to them my royal plighted troth'

Viswamitra heard the monarch's words and led the courageous Rama to the ponderous car wherein lay the bow of Rudra. Rama seized the cover of the chariot and, lifting it high, exposed to view the weapon. Pride of manhood and glory of strength filled his heart as with rapt gaze, he surveyed the bow. He made no rude haste to touch it, ancient in veneration, revered by ages of mighty men.

'Am I permitted,' said he with humble mien to his holy counsellor, 'to approach my hand to this bow? Lend me thy gracious power and help me lift and bend the bow.'

'Yes,' replied the adept, and the king assented

Forthwith Rama laid his hand upon the bow, raised it from the car and stood proudly resting it upon his powerful arm. Next he fitted the cord and strung the bow, a deed emperors had failed to achieve. As if to speed a feathered wand on its deadly aerial flight, Rama drew back the bow-string till, under the fearful strain, the weapon snapped asunder with terrific noise!

Like thunder the clank resounded in the hall, and like thunder the noise rolled through the heavens. The solid ground shook and the distant hills reverberated the sound and shook. Janaka's monarchs and lordly chiefs paled at the unexpected sight and many

fainted from fear, while the hearts of the suitors for the hand of Sita contracted with dismay. Slowly the nobles and the sovereigns woke from their swoons, the life-blood mounted to their cheeks, and Janaka's gracious words were heard

‘My aged eyes have seen the marvellous deed wrought by Rama · a deed unmatched by any in the realms of life or even of fancy. My lustrous Sita, chief adornment of my house, showers on her aged
10 father a still more brilliant glory as she espouses this god-like hero For spoken is the word, and my daughter, than whom my life is not more dear, shall be the prize of Rama's valorous strength, his faithful wife’

Turning to Dasa-ratha's priestly councillor, he continued, ‘O saintly adviser, give us leave and shower upon the journey thy fairest blessings Ambassadors shall mount our chariot and hie away to Ayodhya, there to relate to Rama's sire the new
20 found glory of his son They shall say to Dasa-ratha, “Sita has been won by righteous Rama's wonderful might.” The two princes shall stay with us and be lodged royally in safety in our halls. Meanwhile Dasa-ratha, should he consent to the prayer of our envoys, shall come hither borne in our chariot, to grace and honour our palace with his august presence’

Janaka's proposals met with the approval of the seer, and accordingly honourable peers were chosen
30 as an embassy, and speedily set out to Ayodhya, bearing the royal message

III

MEETING OF DASA-RATHA AND JANAKA

*Royal Greetings—The Cortège—Re-union—Evening
among the Brahmans*

THREE days the embassy travelled with all speed, halting three nights to rest their tired steeds. As they neared Ayodhya, a message from the monarch bade them enter the palace hall where Dasa-ratha sat in council with his peers and attended by his courtiers. Janaka's envoys made low obeisance and gave their royal greeting with an easy grace and calm air, yet boldly, as becomes a great king's messengers.

'Great sovereign, greetings! And greetings to every priest and warrior. We bring from Mithula's monarch wishes for thy health and security. Janaka hath prayed heaven to give thee happiness, and, with Viswamitra's acquiescence, sends a joyful message to thee:

"My troth was plighted far and wide o'er all the earth, blazoned forth by heralds in every land, to wit, 'Whoso shall bend the bow of Rudra shall take my lustrous Sita as his bride.' Responding,

kings and princes, mighty cheftains, warriors of renown flocked hither their strength to try. Shamed and abashed, they returned from Mithila, unsuccessful in their quest. Conducted by their venerable tutor, hither came Rama and Lakshman, his brother. In his hands Rama took the bow and bent it With corded veins and straining sinews Rama forced the bow of brass backward till at last it snapped, before the eyes of a thousand suitors and my monarchs
10 in the hall. 'Tis the will of Heaven : Rama gains the promised bride and thus I fulfil my vow. May thy pleasure accord with mine !

“ Come, monarch of Kosala’s lands, accompanied by thy lords and seers, to Mithila’s domed city. The feast of Mithila wants but thee and the glory thou shalt bring with thee. Rejoice, O father, in the triumph of thy son. Rejoice with Rama in his joy Should not all his brother-princes likewise find fair brides in Mithila ? ”

20 ‘ These words, O Kosala’s monarch, are the glad words of our royal master, sent by Viswamitra’s all-wise aid.’

At the right hand of Dasa-ratha stood Vasishtha and other Brahmans versed in the lore of their religion, and chieftains circled the hall before the throne. To all, the monarch revealed the kindly greeting and request of Janaka.

‘ The will of Dasa-ratha be done ! ’ said the Brahmans in ready assent. Thereupon the king
30 informed the ambassadors that the royal cavalcade would depart from Ayodhya next day at sunrise.

The embassy then withdrew and were lodged courteously as became the honour of their royal host.

No sooner was the glint of the early morning sun thrown back from Ayodhya's many gilded domes, than the aged king was to be found giving his seneschal orders concerning the array.

'First in the cortège place the treasure waggons
Bid the steward of the treasures load them with
gold, silver, gems and rich garments, making a 10
brilliant array Then must follow a goodly company
of warriors in four-fold ranks Next, the corps of
elephants and the finest chargers shall march
Arrange the foot-soldiers in serried ranks and see
that my battle chariot is not forgotten All the
chariots of state are to be prepared and with the
fleetest horses in the traces must wait my appear-
ance The couriers will ride in attendance upon
these Vasishtha and the saintly preceptors will
travel at my side Harness stately chargers to the 20
royal chariot Bid all haste, for we have a long
journey before us'

These instructions were speedily performed and,
Dasa-ratha leading in his royally caparisoned chariot,
the glittering company set out

After a four days' journey they neared Mithila,
and Janaka, being informed by a courier of their
approach, rode to meet them

With gracious words he welcomed Dasa-ratha

'Thy coming, O royal brother, pride of the ancient 30
race of Raghu, sheds glory on my house' I trust

thy journey was peaceful! Welcome to Mithila, whose people wait to greet thee, a royal guest. Welcome! for thy valorous sons await their loving sire. Welcome Vasishtha, the learned expounder of the scriptures! Henceforth no evil omens will descend upon my race. It is hallowed by its alliance with the descendants of warlike Raghu thus in bonds of love. At the rising of the sun let begin the sacrifice and ceremonies duly appointed for this auspicious
10 occasion, and before the darkness of evening descends upon us, the nuptial rites shall be concluded.'

Dasa-ratha reciprocating the high purpose and kingly love of Janaka, made answer :

“The gift is a token of the bounty of the giver,” according to the ancient saying; and, O monarch of Mithila, thy gift is enriched by thy fame and virtue. Over the whole world is Janaka's bounty known, and his grace is inspired by Heaven. We accept his gift and benediction, by which our race is
20 greatly honoured.'

The brother monarchs appeared to vie with one another as to grace of manner and kindliness of greeting. Janaka was delighted, calmly and quietly as the practice of Vedic rites imposed, with Dasa-ratha's answer, even as the latter monarch was gratified by the warmth of Janaka's greeting. The princes, Rama and Lakshman, came forward and greeted their father lovingly, humbly touching his feet with their foreheads. So Dasa-ratha, honoured by Janaka and
30 in the presence of his two sons whose dangers now were safely past, was filled with happiness.

The Brahmans and other priest-preceptors spent the night joyously in their own manner, conversing with men whom they esteemed as no less virtuous than themselves and profoundly learned

One by one the sacred rites were observed by each faithful disciple of Brahma, sitting silently in his isolated chamber, and ere the guests, and those of Mithila, had retired to sweet sleep, the stars gleamed on the shining domes and turrets of the peaceful royal city.

IV.

THE FOUR-FOLD WEDDING.

A Visitor to see Bharat—Preparations—The Sacrifice of OM—Vedic Wedding Ceremony.

THE prince of the Kaikeyan dynasty arrived when Dasa-ratha was engaged in offering gifts of gold and cows, and greeted the venerable monarch, saying .

‘Hear, O king! My father, the sovereign of the Kaikeyan nation, sends by me true greeting and a blessing. He asks concerning Dasa-ratha’s health, and trusts his royal family and household prosper and continue in their former happiness Queen
10 Kaikeya, my sister, is equally with your majesty the object of my solicitude, and I came to see Bharat, her son, whose fame has reached our ears, and who is a worthy scion of his virtuous sire I sped hastily to Ayodhya, where I learned you had departed for Mithila. Travelling from faint dawn to dark night, I hied hither to do thee homage and to greet my sister’s son’

Dasa-ratha was pleased to see his wife’s brother and bestowed gifts upon him. Prince Bharat was
20 brought before them and greeted his uncle, after

which the preparations for the day's four-fold wedding were proceeded with

Early in the morning the king of Kosala, with his four sons and the high Brahman, Vasishtha, offered sacrifice. During the ceremony Vasishtha placed on each of the young men a nuptial cord, as was the custom. Meanwhile, on behalf of the maidens of Janaka's house, his priest, Sata-nanda, performed a similar rite

With minds intent upon the solemnity the four 10 tall princes stood by their father and Vasishtha addressed Janaka to this effect

'Dasa-ratha is here with his sons waiting upon Janaka's pleasure. Between Janaka and Dasa-ratha, the giver and the taker, solemn words are as solemn deeds, therefore in accordance with thy plighted word, let the marriage ceremony proceed to its conclusion'

To which Janaka replied, 'Why does the king wait? My realm is his empire; my palace his royal 20 home. Behold, the maidens in the fulness of their bridal beauty, glorious and radiant as flames, already press the altar's precincts. The altar fire is lighted, and here beside it I stand eager to do thy sacred bidding. Fortunate indeed is the moment! Bid Kosala's monarch approach the canopied dais, leading hither his sons and his honoured priests. If it please Vasishtha, bid the devotions begin'

At the royal invitation Dasa-ratha majestically stepped forward to the platform on which, beside the 30 altar, were placed water-pots and sacrificial dishes

containing rice, clarified butter, curds and other offerings ordained for the sacrifice of OM, which is the symbol of Brahma. Vasishtha, who was accounted the holiest Brahman priest of the two courts, then proceeded to place the two kings in the sacred circle upon the raised platform. Next, Viswamitra and Sata-nanda, who, holy men themselves, regarded him as their preceptor, were stationed on the dais. Taking perfumed garlands, Vasishtha decorated
10 the altar with flowers of exquisite odour pleasing both to gods and men. The altar was now raised and he arranged upon it the various offerings and vessels. Golden ladles were set in readiness. Wonderful vases, pierced in intricate designs; consecrated censers, burning fresh and fragrant incense; goblets of consecrated honey; bowls made of the conch, a large spiral shell; shining silver salvers; these were the vessels used in the sacrifice of OM. Sacrificial plates were set before Dasa-ratha, his sons,
20 and the priestly counsellor. Into some dishes parched rice was poured; into others, corn with the husk still attached, just as it had been pulled in the temple grounds

Vasishtha strewed the foot of the altar with grass of a kind dedicated to the purpose of worship, and by singing a hymn invoked Agni, the god of fire, to render the offerings more acceptable to the gods. The fire being alight, Rama and the sweet-eyed Sita approached to take the marriage vows. Janaka
30 set his daughter face to face with the bridegroom, and with these words the wedding was performed :

‘This is Sita, the child who is dearer to Janaka than his own life. Take her, prince, a faithful wife, to share thy honour and virtue. Cherish her in weal and woe, at home and away, in joy, and in sorrow.’ Placing their hands together, he continued, ‘As the shadow is constant to the substance, so is the faithful wife to her lord. My daughter Sita, peerless among women, walks with thee in life or death.’

A tear fell upon the king’s bosom as he sprinkled the hand-clasped pair with holy water, and his wishes were echoed in earth and heaven.

Sita’s sister then was led to Lakshman who had enjoyed the hospitality of Mithula’s court several days.

‘Fearless Lakshman,’ said Janaka, ‘whom none can turn from duty, take my daughter Urmila. She will be true to thee as she has been devoted to me. Clasp her hand in thine, and love her in life and death.’

20

Bharat was next united by the hand-clasp to a niece of Janaka, who then prayed for blessings upon Satrugna and a fourth beautiful maiden, whose kindness was no less than her grace.

This done, Vasishtha intoned another sacred chant, during which the princes and maidens, hand in hand, lightly stepped round the altar’s burning fire, then round the two friendly monarchs and their priests.

Heaven showed its approval of the unions by a sign. Celestial flowers floated down upon the nuptial

scene, filling the air with a wonderful fragrance, musicians enchanted all with tune and song, and nymphs tripped lightly on the sward with fascinating steps, while each bridegroom led his bride three times round the altar

So ended the four-fold wedding ceremony. The princes led their brides away. Dasa-ratha was escorted to the palace by Janaka and his courtiers and the gaily decorated city of Mithila kept holiday.

V.

INTRIGUE

The Return—Bharat goes to Kaikeya—A False Tongue—Jealousy.

AFTER a short stay in Mithila, Dasa-ratha and his court returned and were accorded a right royal greeting by the citizens of Ayodhya, who had dressed the gates and hung the streets with thousands of garlands and festoons

His queens greeted Dasa-ratha, and the four princes presented their brides to them. Queen Kausalya, Rama's mother, took Sita the soft-eyed to her bosom, while the proud Queen Kaikeyi embraced Mandavi, the bride of Bharat 10

In their joy they did not neglect their religious duties. Indeed their devotion brought added blessings to Dasa-ratha's household. As to the princes, they seemed to have reached the pinnacle of glory and happiness, each dwelling in a fair palace, which it was said, could only be equalled by the abode of Kuvera, the god of prosperity.

One morning after Dasa-ratha had performed his meditations at sunrise he summoned before him Bharat, for Yudajit, the prince of Kaikeya, was 20 still present at the court

‘ Know, my son,’ said the aged king. ‘ the famous prince-warrior, Yudajit, the honoured brother of thy mother, came from that distant country to see thee. Return with him to greet thy grandsire and stay a while with him.’

Soon afterwards Bharat set out with his youngest brother Satrughna as a companion. With many a tear they parted from their consorts and bade good-bye to Rama, Lakshman and their parents. Thus
10 Yudajit with his guards set his face westward and journeyed to his own land proudly escorting the young princes

Now Dasa-ratha was extremely old and sought to relinquish the cares of state. So it happened that Rama gradually assumed many of the more active duties of the sovereign. He won the love of the people by his strict regard for the law ; they considered, indeed, that his only law was the welfare of the subject, so pleased were they with his guidance
20 of justice

As the days of gladness passed, the people thought that the love of Rama and Sita was almost as beautiful as that of their god Vishnu and Lakshmi his consort

Now Dasa-ratha convened his council, and a brighter or more impressive sight has seldom been seen. It was his wish to appoint Rama Regent and to secure the hearty allegiance as well as the consent of his subjects. The town was again decorated
30 and provision made for the housing of nobles and other visitors from distant lands. Dasa-ratha an-

nounced his intention and it was accorded the acclamation of the council. The old man had spent several days in anxiety and his nights had been disturbed by curious dreams of ill omen. He again sounded the opinions of the meeting, particularly asking why those assembled were in favour of Rama as their ruler. The reply left no room for doubt. everyone appeared thoroughly loyal and ready to serve Rama, on whose justice and wisdom they had long relied 10

Accordingly preparations for the ceremony of appointing the Regent were made. The state elephant, the tiger-skin and the white umbrella, portions of the royal insignia, were prepared, and astrologers calculated the auspicious day and moment for Rama's accession. He and Sita accepted the directions of Vasishtha and retired into complete and uninterrupted meditation and fasting in order to consecrate themselves for the memorable occasion. As the crimson of early dawn suffused the skies, 20 Rama arose, performed his ablutions and, arrayed in silken robes, went forth to meet the Brahmans, as the royal minstrels were singing the morning call.

At once the news of the end of the vigil ran through the city. It was the signal for hoisting many a banner, and the people made gay with dances and music, and even hung rows of lamps ready to defy the darkness of evening and thus prolong the joyful day. Little did they suspect that their hopes would 30 be frustrated

Rama was so great a favourite that no right-minded person could have imagined his having a rival. Yet that wicked thought entered the mind of an ill-conditioned servant-woman, Manthara, one of Kaikeyi's maids, who in fact had been her nurse. From a staircase window Manthara had noticed the festive appearance of the town, and when she heard that Rama was to be crowned next day at sun-rise a deadly hatred filled her heart. Kaikeyi was still sleeping and Manthara roused her somewhat roughly

'Kaikeyi, wake! How can you sleep in the face of such danger as threatens you?' This rude awakening shook the queen, but the maid went on, 'He whom you love has dealt falsely by you. The king has by a trick sent Bharat away so as to crown Rama. Henceforth you will be considered inferior to Kausalya.'

Jealousy was not, so far, in Kaikeyi's nature. 'Nay, Manthara,' she replied, 'Rama's happiness is as pleasant to me as if he were my own son. Let us rejoice that Rama's day is come.' And she gave Manthara a jewel in return for what she considered good news.

But Manthara, inflamed against Rama, refused the gift, saying, 'This is no time to be giving presents. Your light-heartedness will soon be turned to grief. How can any woman rejoice when a proud rival is exalted over her? Will this day's ceremony please Queen Kaikeyi when by it Queen Kausalya gains the empire for her son? What has become

of your wonted wisdom, Kaikeyi, that you do not see what is afoot ? Bharat himself is matchless Rama dreads nothing from the twins, but fears the rival claims of your son Of Bharat Rama is jealous, and he feels his throne would be insecure in the light of the great merits of Bharat Believe me, Rama has skill to deal with his enemies, and such he deems Bharat, whom, I say, Heaven assist against his brother. Oh ! happy will Kausalya be to-morrow when her son is reigning ! Queen Kaikeyi will 10 become as a handmaid, like us humble servants, before the proud Queen Shall Bharat too be the slave of Rama ? And shall the fair consort of Bharat become a waiting maid to Sita ?'

Kaikeyi replied angrily, 'Put aside these wicked thoughts, crooked wretch ! Is not Rama the rightful heir ? Will he not guard his brothers as a father would ? When Rama's course is run, then shall Bharat's hopes find true expression As for me, Rama honours me as much as his own mother, 20 and he loves his brothers more than he loves himself'

Still Manthara was not to be checked.

'Why is your mind shrouded from wisdom ? Brother does not succeed brother Our law is that Rama's son shall follow Rama, not his brother Bharat shall spend his life in exile, mark my words Oh, that I should need to entreat for a prince to his own mother ! Your beauty is greater than Kausalya's, and she will never forgive you that subtle 30 offence Therefore let her not assume the power

that will be hers if Rama is crowned. Demand of Dasa-ratha the boon he promised and claim to banish Rama for the space of fourteen years. By that time Bharat's kingdom will be established beyond all doubt.'

The hour of sunrise was rapidly drawing nigh, and Dasa-ratha having seen that all was ready, went to meet his fairest queen and confide his joys to her. Slowly he paced through the garden to her
10 apartment, passing along an avenue of trees with scarlet and yellow blossoms. At last he reached Kaikeyi's chamber with its subdued light filtering through curtains of soft sheen. But his heart stood still a moment when he saw Kaikeyi was not there! He glanced backward to the gardens and longed to see her. Next he sought the warden of her chambers, who replied in terror, 'Queen Kaikeyi has fled to the chamber of mourning and there weeps like one out of her mind.'

20 Thither Dasa-ratha went and on the neglected, bare, dusty floor was Kaikeyi apparently in the torments of deep anguish, for such was the device she adopted by the counsel of the wicked Manthara. The king's anxiety and solicitude, not to mention his love for Kaikeyi, were aroused instantly as he sought to comfort her.

'My Queen and Empress,' said he, 'what is the cause of this dire woe? Surely none hath dared insult thee! If some sudden illness hath befallen
30 thee we have physicians and priests who can allay thy pain.'

Kaikeyi, however, continued weeping

‘Speak! Should you wish to condemn the innocent, or honour the meanest, or liberate the lowest slave, I and my courtiers shall obey your commands!’

VI

THE QUEEN DEMANDS HER BOON.

The King's Anguish—Sentence Pronounced—Rama's Farewell to Sita—Sita's Declaration.

WHEN the royal oath was uttered, Kaikeyi's powers returned and she recalled to the memory of the king how she had once saved his life 'The gods above and the sun, the moon, and the stars, are witness of thy royal oath' In bygone days, O king, when striving with the Demons you thought your wounds were fatal, but my patient attention made you whole. Then you promised me two boons. I have not pressed for their fulfilment, but now the time has
10 come for me to speak. Should they be withheld, this day will be the day of my death Let these ceremonies be for Bharat; let him be crowned Regent-king And Rama shall be exiled for fourteen years in the forest Banish Rama : anoint Bharat.'

For a moment the king could not believe his own ears. He looked at the queen in amazement and fear, as a wounded deer regards the tigress. As the truth dawned upon him he was like one stunned; then in a passion of anger he called her a traitress,
20 saying, 'Why is thy hatred inflamed against the

righteous Rama ? He loves thee as his own mother Have I cherished thee, Kaikeyi, and given thee the throne of Ayodhya, for thee to banish Rama from his kingdom ? Would'st thou exile Kausalya and Sumitra ? Would'st thou indeed rive the life from this aged bosom itself ? Never till life ends can I part with Rama Ask, I pray thee, some other boon, Kaikeyi, some petition prompted by a woman's kindness, but ask me not to commit so heinous a crime ' 10

Kaikeyi, mindful of nothing but her own wicked scheme, taunted the aged king with hesitating to keep his promise 'Let your honour be torn to shreds,' she said, 'and to the assembled monarchs make excuse that your wife's life-long devotion was so little worth that you could not grant her a boon, and for that she died !'

Dasa-ratha tried to reason with the infuriated queen He spoke of Rama's preparation, the rejoicing of the people, the decision of his own council, 20 and the friendliness between Bharat and Rama But all in vain . Kaikeyi replied to the same effect, with added bitterness and the semblance of despair The monarch repenting his rashly spoken words, was afforded no respite by the cruel Kaikeyi, and at last worn out in body and mind he flung himself down praying for the release that comes with death

The moment of good augury was imminent, and Vasishtha sent a messenger to the king bidding him hasten with Rama. Rama, attended by Laksh- 30 man, mounted the chariot and drove to the royal

apartments to do obeisance The perturbed monarch could do no more than murmur his son's name, 'Rama,' after which he sobbed and his bosom heaved The prince was amazed at what he thought his father's anger or coldness, and wondered whether it was a signal of the royal displeasure at any unknown sin or omission of duty on his own part The young man turned to Kaikeyi for explanation She, devoid of real love or pity, pursued her aims.

10 'Neither grief nor pain is the cause of your father's silence, but he fears to proclaim to you his true purpose, until he hears you promise you will abide by his mandate. Before you were born, Rama, your kingly father swore to give me a boon, and now he would break his oath as the low-born do. Promise to abide by his vow, and I will tell you of the cloud on your father's brow.'

'Say on,' replied Rama, 'Rama's task and duty is to obey, even were the poisoned cup or dire exile
20 the command.'

Queen Kaikeyi's ground was now clear, since Dasa-ratha was practically insensible 'This, if you will obey, is the mandate: Fourteen years you must wander as a hermit in the forest of Dandak, clad in the bark of trees and living in a hermit's cell. Let my Bharat take the throne of Ayodhya. Your father is prevented from pronouncing his purpose by his anguish Therefore I have uttered his command and look for you to obey it.'

30 Rama, with his characteristic calmness, bowed acquiescence in what he believed to be his father's

will, and asked what had prevented his father from greeting him as he was wont to do. But torn with grief and dismay the aged monarch, when he essayed to speak, fell in a deep swoon, and the prince sought his mother and Lakshman and told them what had occurred. Kausalya felt the impending separation to be bitter as death, and determined to take her own life by fastings. Rama, however, spoke to her of duty to her aged husband, who would surely die of grief were she to kill herself. Lakshman, whose 10 spirits had not been tempered by meditation, and who had not the share of divinity that was Rama's choicest attribute, was in favour of rebellion, even to the extent of slaying his father if the decree were not repealed; and although in deference to Rama's noble words he desisted from this purpose, he was by no means convinced that submission was the proper course to follow.

It was now Rama's painful task to say farewell to Sita, his wife, whom he must leave, to wander 20 through trackless forests, a prince disinherited. He counselled her to respect and obey Bharat; to love and comfort Kausalya. 'Dearest Sita' we are doomed to part, for I must pass lonely years in the forest. It is my father's will; he is bound by promise and is forced to yield to Kaikeyi, who demands that Bharat shall be king and Rama an exiled hermit. When I am gone, Sita, do these things for my sake - obey my brother, be brave in your sorrow and comfort my mother, Kausalya. shew love also to Kaikeyi 30 Keep vigils at the dawn of every day and pray for

blessings from the gods. We must part now, gentle Sita. Farewell !’

Sita, sweet and gentle though she was, had quite other conceptions of her duty in the case. She waived all thoughts of comfort in a palace while her lord would be facing danger and death.

‘Does my husband speak the words of Rama ? And will he, though banished, forsake his wedded wife ? Nay, I accept not such counsel, for it is not
10 meet from the lips of a prince and a warrior. The faithful woman will go with her husband to the uttermost parts of the earth. The wife’s estate is not to be guided by thoughts of sires, or sons, or brothers : her fate is that of her lord. If, then, Rama goes forward into the thicket, Sita shall go first to make his path smooth. Therefore, reject all fears on my account. The wife makes her home by her husband’s side and clings to him as the shadow to the substance. I fear nothing with thee, for
20 matchless is Rama’s skill. Together we shall wander over hills and through glades, threading the narrow way across the forest and swimming the pellucid stream. Thus shall we spend the years in peace and happiness.’

VII

THE BANISHMENT

*Departure—Exile—The Raft—The Peak
of Beauty.*

LAKSHMAN, touched by the loyalty of Sita, and seeing that his advice was not acceptable to Rama, begged to be allowed to accompany the pair. Rama asked him to stay and aid Kausalya and Sumitra in the event of Kaikeyi's pride again mounting beyond her good feeling, but Lakshman pointed out that the populace themselves would see to the interests of both queens in Rama's absence, while Rama and Sita had not so much as a single guard. 'Grant me to follow you with the bow and sword; let my axe fell the trees for your huts. when you cross the bare mountain peaks let me guard your rest.'

It was decided that Lakshman should collect weapons—coats of mail, bows, quivers full of truly winged arrows and well tempered swords—while Rama dispersed his treasures, now useless to himself among the Brahmans.

The leave-taking of Sita and Kausalya was very tender, the daughter assuring the mother that Rama should come back safe and sound. Sumitra with 20

many tears was content that Lakshman should go to guard his brother and Sita.

Of all the royal household Kaikeyi alone was happy : she was triumphant in that her will was become law, and joy was displayed on all her features, until the sage Vasishtha rebuked her. 'Unfeeling woman ! Ill sits a smile on thy face in the day when thy heart assumes the hardness of the stone !'

10 They mounted the royal chariot and were soon driving rapidly away from Ayodhya. The citizens, however, ran alongside, beseeching Sumantra, the charioteer, to go slowly while they feasted their eyes on Rama. and the prince, glancing backward, saw Dasa-ratha for the last time. An atmosphere of sorrow seemed to have descended upon the city and indeed the whole country : it seemed that horses neighed and elephants roared in sympathy with the woes of men.

20 That night the exiles and the charioteer kept vigil and rested on the banks of a river, the people camping some little distance away. Shortly before daybreak Rama commanded the charioteer to proceed by a devious way, and in the starlight the river was crossed. The people of Ayodhya, not seeing their beloved princes, returned sadly to their homes, while the exiles drove through forest and glade, crossed rivulet and river, till they came to the sacred Ganges rolling onward like a sea

30 The next morning Rama dismissed the royal chariot as they intended to go on foot, and in keeping

with their future life the princes changed their raiment for coats of bark, such as were worn by hermits

They were met by King Guha who provided boats and men to convey them across the Ganges, and the southward journey was begun. As the oarsmen reached the middle of the stream, Sita bade them pause while she offered a simple prayer for the protection of her lord, Rama. 'Goddess of the sacred Ganges' may my lord retrace the journey, his fourteen years of exile done; and I vow thee a 10 thousand fattened kine '

When the boats were beached on the southern strand the travellers proceeded through woods and meads, and towards evening they slew one of the jungle deer and prepared a meal. The early days of the wandering passed pleasantly enough and their sorrows were but lightly felt.

The next morning, the fourth since their departure, found them a few miles from the confluence of the Jumna with the Ganges. Here was an asram or 20 hermitage, far famed for the piety of its dwellers, where rose, in aftertime, the city of Allahabad. 'The Abode of God' Here could be seen evidence of human life; lofty trees had been hewn down and scattered around were piles of billets of which the hermits made their sacrificial fires. Presently they saw a thin line of smoke ascending, as Rama rightly judged, from some anchorite's dwelling screened behind the foliage, and in that direction they bent their steps. Startled by the strange footsteps and 30 still more by the unwonted appearance of arms and

armour in the vicinity, the birds and deer announced the stranger's approach.

The aged priest was about to make the evening offering of milk. Rama told him their story, and said they wished to abide in some holy hermitage and live on wild fruit and water from the spring. The hermit received them in a friendly way, gave them milk and berries, and honoured his guests in the sacrifice, after which he led them to a hut constructed of leafy
10 boughs

'You were not entirely unexpected, princely guests,' said he, 'and you are welcome to make this your abode.'

'For your gracious words I thank you,' answered Rama, 'but I fear your hermitage is too near the populous cities, and the citizens would flock to see Sita and ourselves; and so your sacred meditations would be disturbed.'

To this their host replied that the Peak of Beauty,
20 twenty miles away, was a hermitage that would suit them. It was in the midst of wild jungle from which the beautiful summit could be contemplated, and the three determined to set out next morning.

Accordingly, after a most courteous farewell, they followed the course of the Jumna some distance and the brothers considered how best to cross. Soon they were busy felling stout trees and bamboo and lashing all firmly together with strips of cane. Thus a strong raft was made, and the brothers showed
30 their kindness to Sita by arranging a soft seat of fragrant creeper blooms. Rama handed his wife,

on to the raft and placed beside her the armour and the material for the journey.

They launched the raft and propelled it with long pliable bamboo oars, while Sita folding her arms across her breast, again prayed for a good issue from their impending troubles

Arrived at the other side, Lakshman went first, lopping away all low-hanging branches which might have caused discomfort to Sita, and now and then he reached some tempting fruit or flower for her ¹⁰ Sita was greatly interested in the wild life of the woods, and many were the questions she asked Rama concerning the swans and cranes, monkeys and peacocks, wild-cocks and honeycombs

After a night's rest they completed the journey to the Mount of Beauty, where many a saint lived in seclusion. They were greeted kindly, and Lakshman applied himself to the task of making a cottage. Rama, mindful of the sacrifice necessary on building a home, bade Lakshman slay a black buck and ²⁰ prepare it for the auspicious moment

The huntsman was not long in securing a fine antlered buck, and Rama, fresh from the bath of purification performed the ceremony, calling upon Rudra, Vishnu, and others of the celestials to bless them. The rice was then offered, and Rama raised the altar and shrine in adoration. So amid their peaceful devotions, night descended, enveloping all in sweet and calm repose

VIII

THE KING'S DEATH.

*At Ayodhya—The Curse of Dasa-ratha—His Death—
Meeting of the Brothers.*

THE evening of the arrival at the Peak of Beauty bore sad memories to those who remained at Ayodhya, and upon Dasa-ratha particularly a cloud had descended. An old wrong now weighed upon his mind and, as he pondered, he concluded that his recent misfortunes were part of a plan of retribution which the gods had destined should overtake him

The pall of midnight descended silently over the palace, as Dasa-ratha, rapidly weakening, was conversing with Kausalya on the thoughtless actions of youth which often bear most serious results in after life.

‘My life, Oh, Kausalya,’ said the aged monarch ‘has been withered by one of my youthful deeds. I was famed for my skill with the bow and arrow and could shoot by sound. Proud of this, I went out alone in my car by the river side to hunt, hoping to take a buffalo or an elephant as it came to quench its thirst. As I stalked patiently at the outskirts of the forest, I suddenly heard a splashing of water.

and believing this to be caused by an animal hidden from view by the reeds, I shot at the fancied elephant.

'How terrible was the cry that mounted on the light breeze! Death was told in that wail, with all the horror of the midnight shriek. My weapons dropped from my grasp, and in terror I hastened to the shore, where I saw a boy with his locks dressed after the manner of a hermit, and his water pitcher lay neglected at his side

10

'The boy directed me to the hermitage where his aged parents sat waiting his return with the water, and begged me to withdraw the shaft from his side before going.

'I did so, and the boy died.

'Then I completed his errand, and took the filled pitcher to the priest and his wife who, I saw, were blind. The priest, thinking I was his son welcomed me, although he chided me for being absent longer than usual, because my mother, he said, was in need of the water.

'I scarcely could find words to address them; I could hardly bear to look upon them. But at last, with quavering voice, I imported the dreadful story and begged the priest to pronounce my penance or mercifully pardon my unwitting deed.

'They asked, and I led them to the place, where they mourned grievously by the dead boy, meanwhile performing the funeral rites and preparing the pyre for the burning of the body.

30

'With anguished tears the hermit spoke my doom:

"The greatest sorrow of the parent is to weep for his son, and as you see us weep now, Dasa-ratha, so shall you weep for a righteous son in years that are far in the future."

'With that the sightless pair walked into the pyre and there perished with their son, the flower of their life, which I, unhappy archer, had despoiled.

'And now, Kausalya, after many years the doom has come Rama and Lakshman, faithful and
10 duteous sons, can you forgive me! Ah. Kaikeyi!'

With blessings upon Kausalya and Sumitra, Dasa-ratha relieved his breast of the curse, and after a brief space he died

Vasishtha guided the helm of state during the next few days and sent an envoy hastily to bid Bharat and Satrugna return. The prince himself was not without forebodings of evil by reason of haunting dreams; and even as he was speaking of these
visions the messengers entered. No sooner was
20 the news heard than preparations were made for departure

Bharat found the city of Ayodhya unusually quiet, and he entered unnoticed, surprised to observe signs of neglect in the untidy streets and sadness in the eyes of the people. Arrived at the palace he embraced his mother, Kaikeyi; next he enquired how his father fared.

When he heard, it was vain for Kaikeyi to attempt to comfort him: but when she recounted the fate of
30 Rama, nothing could prevent his outburst of rage against his mother

Kausalya sent for Bharat and at first accused him of scheming to bring about the dethronement of Rama, but his frank avowals at once convinced her that he was guiltless

Manthara had been richly rewarded by the traitress for her share in the plot; and when the princes saw her glorying in her jewels they despised her, and the younger of them beat her till Bharat interposed.

The people came and asked Bharat to assume the regal power, but he protested it would be more ¹⁰ fitting to take an army and search for Rama and restore him to the throne and to this the people agreed. Straightway numbers of men were arrayed and many of the citizens followed. With Sumantra's help Rama's journey was traced. Guha, king of the tribe that guarded the Ganges, when he was assured the errand was peace, assisted the host across; and in due time they came to the hermit, who directed them to the Peak of Beauty. There Bharat halted the army and, accompanied by ²⁰ Sumantra and Guha, advanced to find his brothers.

Now the wild animals lived in peace, such was the virtue of Rama, but at the approach of so great an army many of the birds screamed and the animals grew restive. To discover the reason of this unwonted disturbance Lakshman climbed a tree, and from the eminence observed the army of Bharat. Fearing that he had come to slay Rama and thus make the throne quite secure, Lakshman swore that he would slay both Bharat and Kaikeyi and ³⁰ the mountain sides should be purple with blood.

Rama, however, calmed him, saying he believed Bharat had not come but in peace

Looking round, Bharat saw the cottage in the shade of a feathered palm tree ; the floor was spread with kusa grass, while the strong bows, with their gold pencilling and full quivers, hung upon the walls. Close by were the golden scabbards and swords, and the shields bossed with rings of gold. The altar fire was alight and in calm contemplation Rama
10 sat, his lion-like shoulders contrasting strangely with his eyes which were beaming with gentleness.

‘Is this the prince,’ said Bharat, ‘who is fit to rule the world ? Is he now dressed in raiment of bark-shreds who ought to be the brightness of Ayodhya ?’ And he bowed his head in sorrow.

Rama recognised the features of his brother in spite of their haggard aspect, and in silence the three brothers embraced.

‘What has caused you to come hither from bright
20 Ayodhya, Bharat ?’ asked Rama. ‘Is it our father’s command ? Is all well with the aged monarch ?’

Rama went on to inquire as to the health of the queens and the conduct of the kingdom, and wished Bharat every joy of his realm

At last with tears, Bharat told them how Dasara-
ratha had died of grief soon after Rama’s departure
‘My father’s councillors,’ he continued, ‘wait your
appearing, and I come as a slave to implore you to
30 return and rule the realm.’

IX.

WANDERING IN THE JUNGLE

*The Priestess—A Gift of Weapons—On the Banks
of the Godavari*

As Bharat concluded his woeful tidings, Rama yielded to his sorrow for a moment, then addressed the prostrate prince 'I cannot return till the vow is performed. It is my duty to carry out to the letter my royal father's command Go back and rule the kingdom after the manner of our father Keep the rites: guard thy walls and the herdsmen and tillers with thy bounty: remember the sovereign's duty is to secure the people's good.'

Meanwhile Vasishtha drew near accompanied by 10 the queens The exiles greeted them, and each queen wept as she pressed Sita to her bosom. Kausalya was touched by Sita's faithfulness and noticed how her beauties were fading under the influence of the rough life of an anchorite.

But to all their entreaties Sita and Rama made the same reply—the unchanging vow of duty.

Next came a false priest whose arguments Rama disdained, and once more Bharat besought his elder brother to take the kingdom that waited for him 20

At length Bharat prayed for a token to carry to Ayodhya as a sign of Rama's majesty. He asked for his sandals, and when they were given he said, 'I shall place these upon the throne and it may be they shall help me, by the thought of Rama, to rule Rama's kingdom till he returns. Against that time I will wear bark-raiment and be a hermit in the palace, and if at the expiration of the fourteen years Rama comes not home, Bharat will end his life on
10 the pyre'

So saying, Bharat mounted his chariot and returned with his army and retinue to Ayodhya.

Rama and Sita, shortly afterwards, left the hermitage on account of a large number of Demons who sought to disturb them. As they wandered through the southern forests they came to the hermitage of Atri and his wife, Anasuya, who greeted them with a hearty welcome. Sita was treated as a daughter while the dame listened to her stories
20 of love and pain.

'My birth,' said Sita, 'was a mystery I sprang from a furrow made by the plough of the monarch of Videha. My father, wishing to find me a suitable match, assembled all the monarchs of renown, and Rama alone could bend the bow.' She continued her story down to the present time

Anasuya replied, 'Stay with us, sweet daughter. Your wifely devotion goes to my heart. You have done well to accompany your husband on his jour-
30 neys, for that is the wife's duty And now, see, the wreaths of smoke ascend from each hermit's

dwelling as the evening offering is prepared, and one by one the roving songsters return to their nests, and your princely companion waits for his mate; but before you go, put on this robe and wear this chain and ring for my sake. It does my heart good to see you so beauteous'

After embracing the priestess, Sita went within the hut, where Rama and Lakshman were delighted to hear of the blessings which the votaress had showered upon them

10

Next day their wandering continued its southerly duction. From hermitage to hermitage they proceeded and always met with the kindest reception: indeed often the anchorites were in expectation of the royal trio, as if by mysterious fore-knowledge they were aware of the banishment which they regarded as an important part of a scheme ordered by the gods. At times Rama was invited to assist at the ceremonies entailed by the ceaseless watching and prayer of the adepts: and occasionally they called upon the Son of Dasa-ratha to extend to all votaries his protection against wild beasts and even Demons

Of the greatest import was their arrival at the hermitage of Agastya, who is considered to have been the 'mightiest saint of olden time,' the leader of learning and religious thought in the southern lands of India.

It was Lakshman who met with a pupil of Agastya and announced their errand, asking for the privilege of rendering homage to the saint. Agastya's reply

was, 'Why keep the righteous Rama, the warlike Lakshman, and Sita the soft-eyed waiting for permission? Lead them hither.'

So through the outer groves where the deer browsed undisturbed the three were conducted. Arranged in secluded spots suitable to contemplation were shrines of various gods: Brahma, the first of all—Agni, of fire—Vishnu, the preserver—Indra, the god of the skies—Kuvera, of wealth—Yama, the chief
10 of the dead—Dharma, the god of duty: and Rama felt conscious of a heavenly peace as he gazed upon them.

A moment later Agastya, surrounded by some of his brother hermits, came forth, and Rama made reverent obeisance to him. The priest raised the princes and Sita from the ground, welcomed them cordially, and led them to the seats of honour, while others brought forward the evening meal. First was the sacrifice to Agni, the god of fire, who was
20 regarded as the genius of the home, sheltering its inmates from harm.

The venerable hermit spoke: 'While these simple fruits and flowers betoken our homage to thee as a prince, take from us some gifts, worthy of Rama's acceptance, with which we bestow our blessings. Take, then, this bow, for thou shalt soon need it. Its radiance is of the gems of heaven, for it was made in heaven by Vishnu's armourer. Take, too, this dart. It was Brahma's, and in the hand
30 of a righteous archer it shall never miss its mark. Here is Indra's quiver of arrows. They will not

fail thee in the hour of need These weapons are well known to the Demons, whose forces they have often thinned. Gird on this golden-hafted sword. Keep all these weapons, Rama ; so mayest thou conquer continually like the god of thunder.'

Agastya went on to welcome Sita, and especially he praised her for the devotion to her husband's fortunes

Rama declined Agastya's suggestion that they should reside there, and the saint told him he was 10 aware of his exile and knew the extent of his wanderings He bade him not fear but that great benefit to the world would result from the deeds he was destined to accomplish

The three were next informed how best to reach the river Godavari, and, prophetically as it proved to be, Agastya said, ' On the blossom-covered slope make a cottage for the lovely Sita : with you farther she may not go ' '

Of their life in the forest of Panchavati, for many 20 months all went well Delighted by the animals, trees and flowers, they were also conscious of dwelling together in the greatest happiness. Thus the remainder of that year passed away

Meanwhile, at Ayodhya, Bharat wore the crown, but the regal robes were neglected and he held court in a dress of hermit's bark-clothes His nights were spent on the floor, and his days in penance for the guilty deed of Kaikeyi.

As Rama walked one morning to the frosty river 30 to perform his accustomed ablution he reflected

on these things, and for a moment his resolution wavered ; but at once his mind regained its strength. A tear fell from his eye and mingled with the stream ; and immediately his determination to pursue to the end the sentence of Dasa-ratha was as strong as ever.

X

FIGHTING THE DEMONS

*The Raksha Woman—Fight with Khara—Ravana
angered*

SOUTHERN INDIA was for a long time, according to the ancient scriptures, the favourite abode of hordes of powerful Demons, called Rakshas. In several cases the Rakshas had acquired certain degrees of power and boons from the gods, by dint of spending many years in contemplation of the holy writings, and of saying many prayers. At times the saints were so closely rivalled in the attainment of merits that, in order to gain or maintain their ascendancy over the Demons they were obliged to invent new penances and undertake difficult tasks to increase their own power in heaven. It was a peculiar instance of this strange possibility that led to the change which so soon was to befall Rama and his companions

One day the king of the Rakshas wandered through the forest, accompanied by his brothers and their sister, Surpanakha. She departed from them and at length found herself by the cottage of Rama. As she regarded the lion-like arms, shoulders and

chest of the prince, his gentle eyes and his sweet though powerful voice, she became conscious how ugly she, the Raksha maiden, must be in comparison. Nevertheless, so great was the love which he inspired in her, that she determined to speak to him on the matter

In reply to her question Rama frankly told her the circumstances of their being in the forest, and in return asked whether she was of human birth or
10 of the Demons who could assume different forms at will.

‘Know, then,’ she said, ‘I am a Raksha, sister of the royal Ravana. My empire is unbounded. I left the company of my mighty brothers, drawn by my love for Rama, whom I choose as my husband. Who is the young woman in the cottage? She can scarcely be the wife of a warrior like you. Leave the mis-shapen wretch and devote yourself to me: you shall be lord of my beauty. As for
20 human beings, they are as food to the Rakshas, and so shall I treat your Sita; the youth Lakshman, too, I shall presently slay. But you shall be my husband, and him I obey.’

It was with great difficulty that Rama concealed a smile, and he met these proud remarks with mocking advice ‘You could not be happy with me,’ he said, ‘for you would have a rival for my love. Now there is my brother, Lakshman; he has no wifely companion: for his affections, you would
30 have no rival’

Surpanakha next turned her passionate glances

upon Lakshman, who found it altogether beyond him to treat the offer of marriage seriously.

He said, 'I am but a slave to my royal brother, and would you, beautiful as the lotus flower, be the bride of a servant? Why not be his younger wife? Your superior loveliness would soon oust Sita from the first place in his heart and he would turn to you for a Raksha's love'

Surpanakha then suspected they were mocking her, and in a madness of jealousy and love she shrieked 10 that she would speedily remove the rival from her path. Forthwith she attacked Sita, in the fury of destruction, and before the enraged figure, the helpless Sita fell terror-stricken

Rama saw they had made a mistake to jest with a Demon, and said to Lakshman, 'While I rouse Sita, if indeed she is not dead, do you pursue this shameless fiend.'

Lakshman thereupon drew his sword and severely wounded her, and she fled into the depths of the 20 forest, wailing till the heavens echoed her anguished cries

Her brother, Khara, in response to her request, sent fourteen Rakshas to punish Rama. but that prince killed them all, Surpanakha looking on. She next besought the aid of Khara, who held council with one of his brothers, and they gathered a huge army to attack Rama and Lakshman. Heedless of ominous warnings the Rakshas vowed that Surpanakha should that day drink the blood of the two 30 princes

Hovering unseen were many gods and other celestial beings, who lent aid to Rama by the virtue of their good wishes.

In a moment Rama was surrounded, but taking the bow and arrows, the gifts of Agastya, he speedily discharged so great a number that it seemed as if a cloud was protecting him. And each shaft unerringly brought death to a Demon.

Impatient at this check, the brother of Khara
10 advanced to single combat with the warrior-prince, whose prowess quickly proved the Demon's downfall.

Afraid, for a moment, when his brother fell, Khara came forward to avenge him. Though he succeeded in piercing Rama with a number of darts, Rama was also successful in slaying the horses harnessed to Khara's chariot, as well as his charioteer. Next he inflicted a grievous wound on Khara himself. Then Khara poised his mace and threw it with the
20 speed of a thunder-bolt. But a well-directed arrow from Rama met it in the air and diverted its course so that it fell harmless to the ground. This was the turning point of the duel. Rama now began to prevail, and at last he unslung from his side the shaft which he had reserved. It was the shaft carrying Brahma's dart that shone like a flame of fire. With the suddenness of lightning he threw the dart. It was the last stroke in the terrible fight. Khara fell.

30 The celestial minstrels sang the praises of Rama and the gods heaped blessings upon him.

Still the lust for vengeance of Surpanakha was not abated. She went to Ravana, and what with his own anger at the wholesale slaughter of the Rakshas of whom only one had escaped, and Surpanakha's taunts he was soon ready to consider how to compass the downfall of the wanderers. Of all plans the solitary escaped Raksha warned Ravana not to attack Rama in person. 'The surest way to kill Rama,' he advised, 'will be to carry off his beloved Sita'

10

This counsel seemed excellent, and Ravana, although in possession of a boon from the gods which protected his life against attacks from both gods and demons, decided to abide by the precaution. He betook himself to a hermit of the Raksha Maricha, who lived at the foot of a fig-tree, and told him of his intentions.

Maricha knew what could be the only result of such a course of action, and he trembled at the thought of attacking Rama; and to dissuade Ravana from the attempt he told the following experiences:

'Years ago I stalked the forests, devouring the hermits of Dandaka. Thus I incited the wrath of Viswamitra, who took the case before Dasa-ratha and requested him to allow Rama to attack me. At that time Rama was twelve years old, but the king gave his consent. Needless to say I did not expect a single blow from the boy, and I rushed at him with my axe. He, however, stood firm, and with a well-aimed shaft hurled me miles through the air and I fell into the sea. My forcès were destroyed, but I

was cast up on the coast of Lanka (Ceylon) I advise you, therefore, to be warned. Why should you desire Sita? Your own wives are beautiful: be content I could give you more instances of Rama's puissance. Do not seek the destruction of Lanka, I pray you.'

XI

THE PLOT OF RAVANA.

*The Radiant Deer—Rama and Lakshman Decoyed—
Ravana's Wooing.*

RAVANA could brook no denial and upbraided Maricha for his counsel. 'Take the form of a golden deer,' he sternly commanded 'Go and wave your sapphired antlers before Sita's eyes. She will desire the deer, and Rama will be led to chase you for her. Should Lakshman be told to guard her, you must decoy Rama far away from the hut and then simulate his voice and call out for Lakshman as if in pain. Then Sita will be deserted and I can work my will.'

10

Maricha made another attempt to turn Ravana from his purpose. He pointed out that death was the sure reward of all who took part in this wicked and ill-advised scheme. His own death, he said, would surely be the first to occur. Nevertheless he was willing to obey. His words were unheeded, so he accompanied Ravana in the chariot which flew from Lanka to the banks of Godavari, where the peaceful cottage lay.

In a trice he assumed the form of a most beautiful 20

deer and browsed on the grass and shyly played in the glades until Sita saw him as she came home laden with fruits and flowers. Noticing his golden neck and silver white flanks, she called Rama and Lakshman to see the unwonted sight. Lakshman was very cautious. 'I rather think,' he said, 'this seeming deer is a Raksha disguised. Many a monarch, roaming through these forests, has been beguiled to his death by these Demons, who are able to take any shape they desire. Believe me, creatures of the forest do not go abroad bejewelled, as this deer.'

But Sita was deaf to his wisdom, and called on Rama to secure it for her, alive if possible. She wished to take it with them to Ayodhya, and, if it were killed, she would be pleased to have the skin as a memory of their happy days in the forest of Panchavati. She could not explain the fascination this beautiful beast held over her, but Rama at length yielded to her request, and said to Lakshman, 20 'I think that deer is a fitting object of my shafts, and even if it proved to be, as you suspect, the Raksha Maricha, I should be all the more happy to take him dead and put an end to his fiendish doings. I will go. Meanwhile, guard Sita till my return.'

The deer bounded away, and Rama, armed with bow and arrows, followed. It escaped every trap he had set in the woods to take the deer, and gradually led him a great distance from the cottage. At length 30 Rama strung his bow, fitted an arrow and shot the deer. Maricha fell, mortally wounded, but remember-

ing the last instructions of Ravana, he called aloud, imitating Rama's tones, 'Help me, Lakshman! I die!'

That was the end of Maricha, the fiend, but his cry was heard over the distance and struck terror to the heart of Sita

Rama knew that he had been beguiled and as he hastened to the cottage he felt that all would not go well with Sita

His forebodings were correct Sita on hearing 10 the cry was distressed, visions of death-dealing Rakshas clouded her faith, and in agony of despair she bade Lakshman go to assist Rama

He, however, maintained the same attitude of caution he had previously shown 'Do not be afraid, Sita,' said he, 'There is nothing in the world or in the heavens that can harm Rama. I remain here in obedience to his command and I shall not leave you Be sure it is some device of a Raksha, and put to flight your painful thoughts' 20

But Sita had no mind to think calmly of what she imagined was her husband's death. and as Lakshman showed no signs of departure she became wildly anxious, and even threw doubts on the loyalty of the younger brother. With a frenzied imagination she accused him of desiring the destruction of Rama in order to take her for his own wife Cruel words, these, to Lakshman, whose faithfulness had led him into needless danger on behalf of Rama and his wife! 30

Again he spoke of Rama's might, and gently but

sadly reproached Sita. Finally, stung by the bitterness of her continued fury, he set out in the direction whence came the cry, not before breathing a prayer for the safety and reunion of the royal pair.

Hidden from view, Ravana smiled at the success of his plan to separate Sita from her husband and guardian. Now, since Ravana was in reality a hideous monster, having ten faces and twenty arms, his body being marked by fearful scars received
10 in fighting, he changed his form lest he should defeat his object by startling Sita. All Nature felt his baneful influence: the forest trees stood still as the breeze halted, the waves of the Godavari winced at his red glance, the creatures of the forest stood transfixed !

He caused his hair to become matted, wore sandals, carried a hermit's staff and begging bowl, and in the guise of an anchorite approached the anxious Sita. Courteously he spoke to her as she wept: ' Art
20 thou the goddess of beauty robed in thy simple dress, and wearing her own charms for jewels? Here is no place for thee: a palace would better suit thy presence than the dreary forest where the Rakshas hold sway and the lions and elephants wander. Tell me of thy birth, and why thou art alone in this jungle? '

Sita, reflecting that it was best to concur with the supposed hermit's wishes lest he should curse her pride, told him the simple story of her life, adding
30 that Lakshman was at that very moment walking the pathless forest with his lord Rama. ' Stay

awhile, holy father,' said she, 'and rest your weary limbs. Soon the warriors will return and refresh you with the game that falls to their arrows. Tell me, if you will, what sacred name you bear and how it happens that you should be alone in the jungle.'

'No sacred devotee am I,' answered he, 'my name is Ravana and hordes of Rakshas hear me and obey, for I am their all-powerful lord. Men and gods quake at my wrath. Your beauty has called forth my love. Share with me my boundless realm! 10 Leave the gloom of the jungle of Godavar's banks and fly with me to distant Lanka, the sea-girt city, the fairest in the world. In Lanka's pleasant vales shall Sita roam with her loving lord, Ravana. Five thousand beautiful damsels shall be your maids-of-honour, and your glory shall be above that of all my queens.'

Sita's eyes flashed with fury and in a proud voice she bade Ravana be gone. 'The great and god-like Rama claims me as his wife! Rama, whose 20 might cannot be exceeded, who is as a lion among men, whose virtue and valour are without limit! Truly a cloud has descended over your mind when you approach a warrior's bride with words of passion. It would be wiser in you to fall upon the lion and try to wrench a tooth from his jaw as he hungrily devours the calf. Or to touch the cobra's fang when the bird is fascinated by its eye. Yea, you could raise the ponderous mountain from its rocky foundations, rather than gain the wife of Rama. 30

'Less hurt would you take by penetrating your

brain with a needle, by licking the keen edge of the sword, by seizing the sun from the sky, or by folding tongues of flame in your dress, than would be your meed if you took Sita, wife of Rama, to your dark caverns !’

XII.

THE ABDUCTION OF SITA

*Ravana's Triumph—Sita's Defiance—Rama's Grief
—Directions*

SITA, trembling as much from fear as rage, had shown Ravana the wickedness and danger of his impious purpose, but her eloquence was all in vain. Again the Raksha king spoke of his might and the extent of his dominions, and then proceeded to quote instances of women of ancient times who had resisted the offers of lovers and had thus met with fearful consequences

Sita was not moved by these recitals, and at length Ravana seized her tresses in his left hand and raised 10 her from the ground with his right. He then assumed his demon-form and rose with her shrieking in his grasp

'Rama! Rama! Lakshman!' she cried, but they were too far away.

Not heeding her prayer for mercy, Ravana seated her in his golden car and they rose above the tree-tops. Ceaselessly Sita called on Rama, but there was no response. She was helpless in the grasp of the monster. Sadly she remembered her harsh 20

words to Lakshman, whose warning had been so true. She called upon the unseen dwellers of the forest to recount to Rama the insult that had been laid upon him and the violence done to her.

A solitary helper there was in the shape of a great vulture who, although of Raksha descent, had always warmly regarded the royal couple now so rudely reft apart. Hearing Sita call upon him, the vulture awoke, and from the top of a tree saw
10 what demon work Ravana had begun. After fruitless persuasion the vulture attacked the Raksha king, and many a grievous wound he inflicted with his terrible talons and beak, besides breaking his bow. The vulture's strength, however, was no match for that of Ravana who, in spite of having to drive his car and maintain his hold on Sita, pierced the bird and left it bleeding to death as they passed on.

All in heaven witnessed Ravana's deed, and Sita's
20 suffering gained the sympathy of the gods; but they were powerless to effect any aid, by reason of the boons which the Raksha had won in former days.

Without a pause in their flight they reached the island of Lanka, where Ravana alighted in the city and immediately placed Sita under the care of a number of attendants, bidding them on the pain of death to secure every comfort for her. Next he sent eight of his soldiers into the regions he had just left, to watch and keep him informed of Rama's
30 whereabouts.

Ravana was anxious to please Sita, and next day

he took her through his wonderful palace hoping the sight of untold riches would incline her to listen to his offers—but Sita was too dejected to pay any regard either to his words or his possessions. Besides she was not deceived for an instant as to Ravana's intentions, which were anything but kind. He even went so far as to kneel before her and place her feet upon his head as a token of his subjection to her. Recovering her drooping spirits at once she proudly repudiated his unwelcome attentions and magnified the worth and prowess of Rama.

'Know, foolish Raksha,' she cried, 'thy base designs have sealed the fate of this thy vaunted kingdom. Rama shall come and destroy thee, and thy streets shall flow with Raksha blood.'

At this, Ravana's fury was roused and he showed his true mind. He sternly commanded his female guards to take her out of the palace into a secluded part of the gardens marked off from the rest by a tall thicket: here she was to be watched with the utmost vigilance. And to add to any terror Ravana had inspired in her breast, he threatened to have her deprived of life if she proved unwilling to withdraw those words, which he half feared might be prophetic.

Meanwhile, Rama, having slain the fawn, made the best of his way to the cottage. He was disturbed in mind because of the unrest he observed to have seized the creatures of the woodland, who, it will be remembered, were thus affected by Ravana's evil influence. Soon he perceived Lakshman hurry-

ing towards him, and he concluded it was part of a demoniacal plan to separate Sita from them. He upbraided Lakshman for leaving Sita, and Lakshman, unwilling to mention the false accusation spoken by Sita, confusedly maintained silence.

Rama sped forward and reached the cottage only to discover it empty, and he turned on Lakshman with bitter reproaches. The faithful Lakshman then told Rama how he had constrained Sita to
10 patience and trust in Rama's might, and how it was under the most cruel taunts and false accusations that he had ventured forth at all. This made Rama none the more placable. Blaming his brother for breaking trust, he went about the neighbourhood seeking traces of his stolen wife, and questioning his soul what sins he had done that had brought about this unmerited grief.

The forest creatures were too cowed to give him definite information as to Sita; and in reply to
20 his cries he was assisted only to the extent of being shown the direction of the flight southward, and so for some time the brothers wandered.

Before long they came upon a few flowers lying on the path. These they recognised as Sita's. Farther on they found tremendous footprints, and, some distance away, signs of strife marked by a broken bow, feathers, bloodstains and much trampling of the ground. By this time Rama was convinced the outrage was due to the giant Rakshas
30 and vowed vengeance upon them. Lakshman, however, calmed him by proving that the footprints

were of the same person and that therefore only one was concerned in the deed.

A moment later they had proof, for the dying vulture lay in their path. Rama, mistaking the blood shed by the bird for that of Sita, hastily concluded the gigantic bird had devoured Sita, and ran to put the vulture to death. The bird, however, still had power sufficient to declare the truth, and Rama fell down by its side in gratitude for the help it had rendered and for fresh grief in its death 10 The bird spoke one word more—Ravana had carried Sita southward—and it died. Rama did not neglect to perform the funeral ceremony over the vulture who had been so unfortunate a friend to him and his

On the southward journey they were met by a tremendous Demon, Kabanda. At once a fight began in which the brothers were victorious and Kabanda got his death-blow. While breathing his last he begged to know the names of his slayers, 20 and when he heard them his pale face lit with joy for a moment. Presently he spoke, 'I am a fiend by the power of Indra's curse' it was to break when I met Rama and Lakshman. Therefore, when I am dead, burn my body, and I will return to you with welcome counsel.' Thus speaking, Kabanda died.

They rapidly collected wood for the funeral pyre and laid the dead body thereon, when, behold, a beautiful shape arose from the flames, descended 30 to the ground and then mounted a chariot, drawn

by swans, which had mysteriously appeared. The youth told the brothers to seek a king named Sugriva, and directed them to the lotus-covered lake by which he resided.

XIII

RAMA AMONG THE VANARS

*Friends in Misfortune—A Woman's Warning—Bali
the Mighty—Sugriva crowned*

SUGRIVA, to whom the brothers were advised to go, was the half-brother of Bali, their fathers being gods. Bali had usurped the throne of Sugriva, driving him away from his wife and causing him to live in a cave. Sugriva was king of a race known as Vanars, who are conceived of as monkeys, yet having many attributes of human beings.

When Sugriva saw the strangers advancing he was afraid they were armed men sent by Bali for the purpose of killing him, and he quickly departed 10 beyond the view of Rama and Lakshman while he held council with his banished officers.

The chief of his supporters was Hanuman, who undertook to meet the warriors disguised as a begging priest and learn their errand. Accordingly he approached them and asked their story in a manner which commended itself to Rama. In reply Rama said they wished to take counsel of Sugriva, which pleased Hanuman, as he hoped that this might be the beginning of an alliance which would be of 20

advantage to Sugriva The brothers unfolded their story, and Hanuman promised help from the forces of Sugriva

He then threw off the disguise, took again his own giant form, and, lifting the brothers in his arms, carried them before the king and explained their plight

‘Your sorrows are much alike!’ remarked Hanuman, ‘therefore agree to aid each other.’

- 10 With that Sugriva told Rama that he was banished from the empire of Kishkinda, and, like Rama, had lost his queen He then showed Rama a woman’s scarf and some ornaments, which he said had been thrown to earth by a woman as she was carried southward by an enormous fiend Rama wept on seeing Sita’s ornaments, and the two unfortunate kings swore an oath of mutual help and friendship, which was ratified over the altar by Hanuman

When they had rested awhile, Rama asked how
20 the banishment of his new friend had been brought about, and since some knowledge of Bali and his power would help in the war they should wage together, Sugriva gave the following account of his wrongs :

Bali, the elder of the two, was chosen king and Sugriva did homage to him. After a time jealousy arose between Bali and a Raksha on account of a woman whom both desired One night the Demon invaded Kishkindha and called out Bali to fight,
30 and he, nothing loth, cut down all who would have hindered him and rushed to give battle The Raksha,

getting the worst of it, fled into a deep cavern and Bali commanded Sugriva to stay by the entrance while he pursued. For a twelve-month Sugriva stood there, and nothing happened; then came out a stream of frothing blood and he listened for signs of Bali's return.

Hearing nothing, and thinking Bali was surely dead, he sealed up the cavern and returned to the capital to perform the funeral rites for his brother. He was then pressed to become king and ruled for 10 a time.

Suddenly Bali returned in the greatest rage, killed all who had taken part at the coronation and accused Sugriva of sealing the cave in order to kill him for the sake of the throne. No hearing was given to Sugriva's protestations and he was banished.

From this story Rama could see that Bali was no mean contestant and enquired more of his prowess, so Sugriva related a fight between another Demon and Bali. The Demon gave a challenge and finally 20 Bali agreed to fight. In the form of a huge buffalo the fiend roared, Bali rushed out and after a brief struggle seized him by the horns and threw him down. Then ensued a great duel, during which one of Bali's arrows pierced seven trees. At length the dead body of the beast was hurled through the air for several miles.

Sugriva showed Rama the seven trees; whereupon he fitted an arrow and drew the bow. The arrow pierced every tree and even the hill in the 30 distance, after which it re-entered the quiver. The

king of the Vanars realised 'the nature of his ally and felt hopeful as to the issue of the fight. So impatient to begin was he that he went off, then and there, and challenged Bali. In the conflict which followed Rama was unable to use his skill because the brothers were so closely locked together that he dared not shoot for fear of wounding Sugriva. The battle was not decided that day but of the two Sugriva had the worse, and upbraided Rama for
10 merely looking on. Rama therefore advised him to wear a garland during the next conflict, so that he would be easily distinguished from his brother.

Acting on this recommendation Sugriva was anxious to renew the attack, and in a short time he again stood outside the walls of Kishkindha roaring a challenge at Bali. This had the effect of angering Bali exceedingly. He rose and stamped furiously across his hall, and his fiery eyes seemed as if they would scorch to death the cause of his fury.

20 But his wife, Tara, endeavoured to calm him. 'Wait another day,' said she, 'before giving vent to your wrath, and consider the thoughts that have arisen in my mind. None knows better than you how little advantage Sugriva derived from his last onset, and, since his defiant shout comes forth so soon, methinks he does not rely merely on his own resources. He has another, a stronger, to aid him. Moreover, his succourer is no weakling, he is a powerful king, for, hear what my son tells me. Roaming
30 in the forest his envoys have brought him tidings that the far-famed princes of Ayodhya are near

at hand, and I should deem it likely that they have become the allies of Sugriva. Rama's strokes are like lightning, and much virtue resides in him for the resistance of valiant onslaughts. Dear lord, imperil not yourself by making him your foe. Rather close the quarrel, for an empire diminishes when princely brothers fight. Let my tears weigh with you. seek peace and not death.'

Bali, however, replied that no insulting call to arms from a foe once crushed could pass neglected 10 by a man of kingly spirit. 'Bali denies no request for conflict, even should the mighty Rama sustain the foeman. Go to your maidens, Tara, this wisely counsel makes a warrior timid as a woman. I shall return to your embrace when the foe is vanquished.'

So they parted, and Bali passed beyond the confines of the city, glaring round for Sugriva. After a preliminary parley of taunt and boast, each donned his armour. And then began a struggle in which 20 both shed streams of purple gore. Then Sugriva seized a tree and, whirling it round his head to gain momentum, he hurled it straight at Bali. Bali staggered, like a ship buffeted by a mighty sea, and all but fell; but he recovered. Fiercer than ever he closed in and grappled with Sugriva, and for some time the combatants wrestled, rolled on the ground, and tore pieces of flesh from each other's bodies, until in the end Bali overthrew Sugriva and was about to slay him.

30

The suppliant eye of Sugriva now turned to Rama,

praying his aid. Rama drew his bow, the arrow sped unerringly and Bali fell.

The queen, Tara, wept to see him fall, and Sugriva too shed tears for his brother. Bali complained of the unequal fight, but Rama spoke of the wrongs he had done Sugriva. At the last moment the brothers were reconciled, and the dying king appointed Rama to be guardian of his son Angada.

The widow, Tara, was determined to immolate
10 herself on Bali's funeral pyre. Rama's words, however, deterred her, and she remembered her son, Angada, and lived for his sake.

The chiefs gathered round Rama praising his prowess, and Hanuman hailed him the victor and welcomed him to the ceremony of consecrating the new king. Sugriva

Rama could not accept the invitation, as the mandate of his father ruled that he should not enter any city until the expiration of the fourteen years ;
20 but he bade Sugriva enter and take up his kingly duties. He also commanded him to take the eldest son of his eldest brother, according to the law, and share the throne with Angada.

As the rainy season was at hand, during which his vengeance on the Rakshas could not be carried out, he said Lakshman and himself would find a sheltering cavern and lodge there till the season had passed, after which they would journey southward again.

30 Sugriva then went to the palace to receive homage of priest and warrior. They sprinkled sacred water

from bejewelled vases, and arranged the sacrificial gifts of gold, gems, herbs, butter and honey. The dancing maids took their part in the service; the priests accepted bounty and chanted the prayers ordained. Water gathered by pilgrims from each of the sacred rivers and from the ocean was poured from the golden jars into smaller vases and into horns of wild bulls, and thence, as the custom was, upon Sugriva. The whole city shouted with joy as Sugriva ascended the throne, together with 10 the youthful Angada, as Rama had suggested.

After a time Tara was consoled and once again married Sugriva from whom she had been snatched by the oppressor.

XIV.

THE QUEST FOR SITA.

Mountain Rains—Man's Ingratitude—Sita in the Garden—Tokens Exchanged.

DURING the monsoon, or rainy season, Rama and Lakshman had time to rest, and no doubt the contemplation of the natural beauties soothed their troubles to some extent. The imagination of Rama suggested to him symbols in the clouds; the dense greyish-black clouds were hermits toiling up the mountain heights—the lighter ones were galleries, up the tiers of which one could climb to the Sun-god and wreath him with fragrance—
10 the evening clouds, when the ruddy glow pierced them, seemed to have been wounded with the sword-marks of a celestial giant—while a rift of golden tint which from time to time opened into view was a lover anointed with sandal-paste and breathing a sigh in the breeze

Nevertheless the figure most often present to his mind was a fearful one. When the storm raged, the mountain-top lit by lightning and forest trees wildly waved as if they would break, his fancy
20 pictured the lonely Sita struggling vainly in the grasp

of the gigantic Raksha. Still there was comfort in the promise of Sugriva to provide a host for the rescue of the stolen wife.

At length the rains ceased, but there were no signs of Sugriva's seeking out the royal hermits in their cave. It was evident that the king of the Vanars had forgotten or was neglecting his duty to his deliverers. Rama therefore sent Lakshman to his palace to call to mind Sugriva's promise and also to remind him of the twang of Rama's bow. He was only too pleased to go, and the men of Kishkinda hastened out of his pathway, so great was his rage against their king. They informed Sugriva, who paid no heed at first, but Angada undertook to rouse him from his drowsiness.

At last Lakshman strode into the palace, and the frightened roaring of the Vanar men overcame the effects of the wine which Sugriva had been drinking. His councillors advised him to give willing ear to Lakshman and make amends speedily for his tardiness. It was Sugriva's shameful confession that he had forgotten his debt in his happiness, and he presented himself to Lakshman with arms submissively folded over his bosom.

Rama's envoy startled the king by his martial and threatening appearance as he approached to upbraid him for being guilty of the unpardonable sin—requiting service with neglectful ingratitude. But by Tara's good offices a reconciliation was effected, Lakshman regretting his outspokenness. In his chariot Sugriva carried him back to Rama.

and promised instantly to mobilise an innumerable army. This was done

First Rama suggested that they should search for Sita. Having been obliged to wander all over India and the bordering countries when fleeing the wrath of Bali, Sugriva knew the details of paths and gave full instructions to the leaders of four groups of selected men which he despatched in the four cardinal directions

- 10 The strongest force, under Hanuman and Angada, set out for the south. Hanuman, being the son of Marut, the god of the winds, knew all routes and was almost as active as his father.

The other armies returned after a month's seeking, and Hanuman's force spent as long without result roaming the lofty Vindhya mountains. They determined to die of starvation by the ocean shore rather than return empty-handed to face the wrath of Sugriva. One day, however, help came from
20 an unexpected quarter

Now the vulture Raksha whom Ravana had slain, had an elder brother named Sampati. Food was brought to Sampati by his son who told him of the abduction of Sita, and he now informed Hanuman that probably Sita would be discovered within sea-girt Lanka

Many of the captains in Hanuman's force could leap well; but he himself inherited marvellous powers, and it was clear that on this depended his chance
30 of crossing the sea between the mainland and Lanka. Climbing a high mountain he sprang. Rakshas

in the air tried to impede him but in vain. He diminished his size as he was about to alight on a hill of Lanka, for he did not wish the guard to observe his coming, neither did he wish to shake the rocks as he came to earth. He surveyed the island, marked the city and, admiring the beauty of the place, entered by moonlight. Its houses were stately and its streets wide, and there were many beautiful gardens. Of its people he saw that, while many were horrible to look at, some were fair enough and wore 10 costly jewels. Hanuman gained entrance to the palace where he saw the wonderful car made by the artificer of the gods and stolen by Ravana, whom now he beheld sleeping surrounded by his wives. The unbidden visitor did not wait to look for Sita there, but passed out into the palace-grounds where, in a garden hedged from common view by tall trees, he discerned a weeping woman dressed in rustic fashion and attended, or rather imprisoned, by a group of horrible hags. This, he divined, 20 was Sita, though wan with grief and fasting.

Taking a safe lodging in the fork of a leafy tree, Hanuman watched till day. At dawn the musicians sweetly played to waken Ravana who, as soon as he was decked in royal ornaments, came forth to greet Sita with words of love. She repulsed him with bitter words, bidding him restore her to Rama ere in vengeance the city was destroyed. Hanuman then witnessed how cruelly Ravana cursed her and left her to the mockery of the Raksha women, 30 while Sita, worn with weeping for Rama, was fain

to fall on the grass, shading her eyes from the unwelcome sights which assailed them.

Thoroughly weary, she sank to rest and the vile guard left her. Hanuman wondered how to approach so as not to arouse a suspicion that he was but a metamorphosis of Ravana instead of a friend. With deep wisdom he decided it would be best to chant to her a song of Rama by which her mind would be soothed. So, beginning with the ancient
10 rule of Dasa-ratha in Ayodhya, he proceeded through the main points of the history of Rama, laying particular stress on what had happened since Sita's abduction

Sita awoke as from a pleasing dream and looked round for the singer. Then Hanuman approached and told her that he was a general of Sugriva's army which had searched all India for the stolen Sita. Finally he convinced her by producing a ring sent by Rama as a token.

20 Sita marvelled at his being able to enter Lanka, and asked many questions of Rama's welfare. How sweet it was to hear of Rama's constancy and virtue! Best of all to hear of Rama's oath!—that he would partake neither of venison nor honey till he should be united once more to Sita.

She then took a jewel from her brow and gave it to Hanuman as a token for Rama, and Hanuman departed.

Still, he wished to do some damage as an earnest
30 of the reward in store for Ravana. He pulled up a few trees in the royal grounds, spoiled the secluded

baths and overturned some houses before the Raksha guards turned out to investigate. Then, having cut down all near him, Hanuman grasped a stone pillar, whirled it round and dashed it into the Raksha temple, which caught fire. Several champions came out against him and he gave them all a taste of the future conflict. But one of them, named Indrajit, wielded a magic noose and captured him. Nevertheless he was pleased to go before Ravana and bore himself bravely. Being an envoy he was allowed ¹⁰ to depart, but Ravana commanded them to set fire to his tail. Fortunately this diminished his size, and he slipped out of his fetters and escaped. Swinging his tail he set many great buildings on fire before he took a leap into the sea.

So he returned to Sugriva, and gave Rama the jewel which he recognised as that which Janaka had bound on the brow of Sita on their wedding day.

XV.

RAVANA'S COUNCIL OF WAR

*Warlike Speeches—A Warning—Loyalty—
Bibhishana Secedes.*

WHEN next the story goes to Rama and his hosts we shall hear that they are by the sea gazing over the rolling waters alive with leviathans of a terrible nature; meanwhile, during their march thither, Ravana was holding his council of war.

From the opening sentences of his address one would have thought him the most reasonable and least passionate being in the world. He bade his councillors fear nothing, but speak what they thought
10 He said that foolish kings acted without any regard for the lives or opinions of others, but that the wisest course was always to hear the wisdom of tried men, and from their blended opinion shape a safe, if daring, course of action 'It is my part,' he said, 'to sift your advice; therefore, speak, whether you desire peace or wish the mighty Rama with Sugriva's countless hordes to invest our fair Lanka'

There was no doubt Ravana was much impressed by his experiences at the hands of Hanuman, who
20 was merely the envoy of his leaders'

The first speaker disdained Ravana's attitude 'Why, Ravana, are you afraid? The gods dare naught against you; wherefore then fear mortals? As for Hanuman, he came as a spy unknown. In drawn up battle he could never have escaped alive from me. Repentance is not for Ravana, nor must he, sorrowing, give up Sita, while he commands his faithful Rakshas.'

A second warrior, grim and cruel of aspect and of angry voice, then rose and voted for single combat, 10 or rather that he alone should be sent against the foe 'Hanuman has wrought insult upon Lanka which cannot be forgotten till it be wiped out. He has violated our unconquered city by entering it unseen. He has, moreover, seen the palace beauties in the innermost rooms. No mockery shall he live to utter against Ravana, for, if it be Ravana's will, I myself will seek him out from earth or sky or ocean, and not a Vanar shall be left on the earth.'

The third iron-toothed warrior rose in great excitement and brandished a tremendous blood-stained mace. He offered two suggestions, one that he alone should attack the arrogant Sugriva and put his forces to flight, the other was a very black counsel indeed. 'As Rakshas we may change our forms. Let us become as human beings and simulate the forces of Bharat. Rama will welcome us among his ranks, when we can speedily use rock, javelin, arrow and sling to their complete annihilation.'

The next two speakers were each hoping to gain 30 personal glory. One would have attacked Rama

and Lakshman single-handed; the second intended not only to slay the princes but added the Vanar heroes to the list. And so twenty voted at that council meeting.

Now Bibhishana spoke. He was the youngest brother of Ravana and had a reputation for wise words.

‘Forgive me, king and elder brother, if I rise in this august assembly and give vent to opinions
10 which are contrary to those of the mighty warriors and your own unfortunate choice. Rama comes against us in the strongest faith. It is vain that guilty Ravana should fight against virtuous Rama! Make no mistake! He who lately crossed the waves and despoiled our temples and turrets is no ordinary Vanar to be despised as a foe! Neither is the right-ful monarch of Ayodhya a feeble hermit. Why
20 should you have taken Rama’s consort? What dreadful deed has Sita done that she should be fettered in our dungeons? My counsel is this: Restore Sita to her wedded lord, and quickly, for Rama is even now thundering at our shores. Restore her before he pours out Raksha blood on our fields, before he pounces upon Lanka like an infuriated and hungry beast.’

This was quite foreign to Ravana’s mind. He rose in angry haste and ran to give orders as to the disposition of the troops. By this time, his doughty brother, Kumbha-karna had thoroughly awakened
30 from his six-months’ sleep. Having heard Bibhishana’s speech he rose and applauded it:

'Useless now is repentance and counsel to Ravana
The time for taking advice was before he snatched
away the innocent Sita from Rama, harmless because
unbereaved There is heavy toil before us, but
the whole issue is one bred of folly. Nevertheless,
Kumbha-karna knows what duty bids him do
He will be true to his king and kin, whether right
or wrong, and will fight against his foe Should
the gods themselves cross my path they will tremble
at my height and skill Rama's bow shall send no 10
second arrow ere his limbs are sundered by my strokes
The rights or wrongs of the quarrel I leave to others
to decide, 'tis mine to fight the Rakshas' cause
Therefore, Ravana rise, and I will slay Rama.
then make Sita your wife!'

Indrajit, the son of Ravana, rose in contempt of
Bibhishana's advice, saying he was the only weak-
ling of all the Raksha force as his feeble-hearted
counsel had proved

Ravana now rose, vexed in mind by the trend of 20
the counsel, for he could not forget the effect of
Hanuman's deeds Still, he was swayed by the boast-
ings of his officers, and upon the one who dissented
he turned a look of withering scorn, and attacked
him with furious words as if he were a traitor

'Who are a man's false friends? What is the
worth of the love of a relative? It is better to make
a home in a nest of cobras than to heed friends who
grow fickle and falter when danger comes nigh
Who but his friends regret a man's proud advance 30
to glory? Who but his friends seek out every

fault? Bibhishana gives us false counsel. He is envious and would be a traitor if he dared. Go from our sight! Take your treachery into the foeman's camp! I cannot be guilty of a brother's blood, else would I slay the Raksha coward!'

Bibhishana trembled with rage at this unexpected outburst, then rushed before Ravana with sword drawn, threatening to kill him. He refrained, however, and made a speech as dignified as the
10 circumstances would permit.

'I spare your life: your words are those of anger, not those of truth. You are surrounded by courtiers who comply with your will because they dare not cross your desires. Go, then, Ravana, and meet your fate at the point of Rama's dart. Your wicked love of Sita lures you to your death. Yet, brother, let me make a last appeal. Consider it well: save your ancient city and the Raksha race. . . . Now is the time of parting. Beware'

20 Thus speaking, Bibhishana, attended by four fierce warrior giants, left the counsel chamber and abandoned the war-lovers to their fates. Humiliated by their treatment of him, as well as disgusted with their unwarranted pride, he crossed the sea and in time came to the host of Rama and Sugriva.

The allies were naturally suspicious of the Rakshas, but both Rama and Hanuman were inclined to take them at their word. So they were received at Rama's council-board, where their advice and knowledge
30 of the district were of the utmost value and as such duly prized.

XVI

THE SIEGE OF LANKA.

*The Bridge of Rama—The Serpent Noose—Sita
Dismayed—Ravana's Ire*

RAMA had postponed his council until the march of his army should be stopped by the sea. Here, as we have seen, he met with Bibhishana, who advised that the god of the ocean should be propitiated by sacrifices. Owing to Rama's virtue this god appeared, though for a long time he was reluctant, and recommended that Nala, the son of the celestial architect, should be asked to direct the building of a bridge from the mainland to Lanka.

Nala proved willing and he undertook the whole 10 of the task. For five days millions of monkey-Vanars were hurrying to and fro, bringing stones, billets and tree-trunks innumerable, which Nala placed suitably until a broad causeway was completed. To this day a chain of great rocks extending irregularly between India and Ceylon is variously called Rama's Bridge or Adam's Bridge, and a gigantic footprint, six feet long, is traced out—memories of the causeway built for the safe passage of Sugriva's host

Ravana had sent spies, but they were each captured. Rama, however, suffered them to return. The time he could devote to Sita, Ravana spent in wooing, but with no further satisfaction. Finally he became very cruel. By magic, one of the Rakshas made a human head like Rama's and counterfeited his armour. These were shown to Sita as trophies by Ravana.

It is needless to picture Sita's grief, but, happily,
10 a messenger entered and Ravana hastily departed. Soon after, one of the Demon women, a little softer-hearted than her sisters, bade Sita not believe her eyes. 'For,' said she, 'it is at the living Rama's challenge that the king of Lanka has so hurriedly departed' The truth of this statement was attested, for immediately Sita felt the ground shaking with the martial tread of the Demon squadrons

Rama, Lakshman, Sugriva and Bibhishana surveyed the city from a hill. Next morning as Ravana
20 appeared on a watch-tower looking with dismay at the hosts surrounding his city, Sugriva, with a terrible war-cry, sprang into the air and attacked him. It has to be recorded, however, that the Vanar king was glad to escape with his life. So the battle began.

The Vanars followed fast, and to Ravana it seemed that the green hills beyond the city had become brown like the ploughed land when it is parched, so many and so close were the Vanars. He opened
30 the gates of the city and his battalion of war elephants rushed among the monkey horde, slaying

thousands by their trampling and with their tusks Here and there could be seen a Raksha regaling himself with the blood of his victims Things went hard with Sugriva's forces the greater part of the day, but they closed their ranks bravely and sustained the furious charges

Lakshman and Rama checked the Raksha success, a great number of the Demons falling to their arrows Each of them had the power to shoot arrows with incredible speed and the giants fell like dry forest trees in a jungle fire Midnight brought no abatement of the battle Yells of the wounded, shouts of the elephant drivers and shrieks of the dying rent the air as Rama's untiring arm dealt death to the Rakshas Among others the iron-toothed councillor of Ravana had fallen, yet nothing could daunt them

The tide of war was stemmed by Indrajit, the pride of Lanka, son of Ravana, whose noose had before captured the agile Hanuman It is true, 20 Angada had slain the horses and drivers of Indrajit's car, but he hid in the gloom of midnight and cast his fatal loop unhindered. This magic lasso was composed of snakes and had the power of draining immense quantities of blood from those whom it bound. Thus Rama and Lakshman lost their strength, unable to shoot the invisible foe who had so securely bound them

Ravana made much of Indrajit's prowess and with wonted cruelty ordered Sita to be fetched in 30 the chariot to see her husband and kinsman in the

pale appearance of death. Believing them dead she mourned their fate in anguish, remembering also their mothers Kausalya and Sumitra, and Urmila, Lakshman's bride, waiting in vain

One of the kindly Raksha women restored her hopes and, having found a coign of vantage whence she could see the deathlike brothers, kept her informed as to their end. She saw the Vanars gather round them and thus comforted the weeping wife : ' Mourn
10 no longer, lovely Sita, for Rama is not dead. Grievously wounded he may be, but soldiers never gather round a leader when he is fallen, as these Vanars now press to hear Rama speak. Had he died, their army had melted like snow.'

She was then conveyed to her gilded prison The fact that one of the Raksha women could speak so kindly of her country's foe had a restoring effect little less than the knowledge that Rama had not gone beyond the borders of life

20 Slowly Rama woke and seeing Lakshman still in the trance he bade Sugriva end the war and return. As he spoke a strange sign appeared in the heavens A mighty rushing sound was followed by flashes of lightning and all the usual appearances of a wind-storm great enough to tear trees up by the roots and to lash the waves into foam Then came into view the winged Garuda, a celestial being, the king of all that flies, half man, half eagle, whose task it was to convey the god Vishnu swiftly across the
30 skies. From his mother, Garuda had derived ceaseless enmity against the serpents, and now he was

sent by the gods to attack the serpents with which Indrajit had bound the princes

The writhing hissing knots fell away at Garuda's glance With his healing wing he restored Rama and Lakshman, and bidding them fight till they had conquered the foes of both gods and men, he ascended in a flash of light

As soon as Ravana heard the heroes were free he commanded picked champions to lead the battle into the Vanar quarters One dark-eyed chief 10 issued forth with the fury of a tornado, only to roll dead like a rock, when struck by Hanuman's shaft

Another chief seemed to mow the Vanars down, but he was laid lifeless by Angada An unbeaten warrior next left the city wall, but his progress was brief. Hanuman's eye had marked him and down the Raksha fell

A gigantic Demon in strong armour thought to break the Vanar line, but he was felled like a forest tree

20

Rama's iron circle, (his bow), was still unbroken and many of Ravana's chieftains and kindred were slain No longer could Ravana regard the Vanars as unworthy of his own skill. besides, the blood of his tribesmen cried for vengeance He ordered his car to be brought and he thundered through the gates of Lanka, surrounded by thousands of his warriors, while the roll of his drums and the cries of his men cleft the heavens

XVII

THE DEMONS' VALOUR.

Ravana's First Battle—Kumbha-karna—Raksha Sacrifice—Indrajit's Fall

KING Sugriva boldly ventured to check the victorious progress of Ravana by hurling a great rock at the Raksha Ravana, though startled, was quick enough to dash the stone aside, and Sugriva fell pierced by a shower of arrows. Vanar chiefs attacked with no more success, and even Hanuman went down before Ravana's terrific onslaught.

Singling out chief after chief victoriously he at length came before Lakshman who stood erect
10 and bold. 'Come, lord of Lanka,' he cried as he challenged the Raksha, 'Is your power too feeble to warrant a combat with one of equal rank?'

To which Ravana replied, 'Destiny brings you into my path and your fate is sealed.'

Immediately they fell to, using their bows and arrows. From Ravana's bent bow seven glittering shafts flew, but each one Lakshman saw and split with his own darts before it reached the summit of its flight. Swifter than Ravana's was Laksh-
20 man's fire, and he wounded his foe several times

Wild with rage the Demon flung aside his quiver

and drew a javelin endowed by the gods with mystic qualities, a gift in the days of old. Before this weapon, the shafts of Lakshman, though still unerring, were powerless. He fell, faint and bleeding, and Hanuman carried him off the battle-field. Seeing the stroke Rama directed one arrow upon Ravana. It was enough. For he sought refuge in flight and rested not until he was safely within the gates of Lanka.

The doughtiest of all the Rakshas was Kumbha- 10
karna, who after his important speech at the council of war, had at once resumed his sleep. Ravana ordered servants to waken him while others prepared a great feast upon which he might regale himself. Wakening Kumbha-karna was never a light task, and as this occasion was so soon after the commencement of his slumbers the royal elephants were brought into requisition, and after some trampling by them he awoke in the humour one might expect. His temper was soothed by the feast, after which he went 20
to Ravana who was more than delighted to see his gigantic brother. The tale of disgrace and defeat was speedily told and Kumbha-karna strode through the city gates, shaking the ground as he went. At sight of him the Vanars fled, but they were rallied by their prince Angada. Stones, trees, arrows were now rained upon the Raksha, but so hard were his limbs that the rocks broke upon them and fell as pebbles, and whole trees, pulled up by the roots split into splinters. In their fright many of the 30
Vanars fled to the causeway, while others hid in

caves It seemed that he alone would sweep the invaders into the sea

Hanuman seized a rock and with terrible force threw it at the head of the monster. Kumbhakarna turned the missile aside with the head of his spear and a moment later Hanuman fell wounded. Three chiefs failed in an attack, then Angada made a second attempt, but the Demon caught him up and dashed him senseless to the ground. His next
10 victim was Sugriva who snatched a rock from the foot of a mountain and spoke defiantly ; but all in vain, for he himself went down struck by a stone from the giant's hand.

Seeking foes still mightier, Kumbha-karna then addressed Lakshman ' Oh fearless Lakshman, son of Sumitra, I acknowledge your warlike skill, but let me pass you in peace as I desire a duel with your elder brother, who is still mightier.'

Lakshman replied, ' Oh Raksha prince, unequalled
20 in prowess, I own your victories , Rama waits yonder, and more powerful than the immortals, he will give you the death-stroke '

The duel began. Rama's arrows pierced Kumbhakarna, who felt his death drawing nearer with each point The arrows of Indra did their appointed work. One tore off his arm ; others severed his legs ; a last one ripped his body-armour and separated the head from the trunk. Maimed, headless, lifeless, the body of the Raksha warrior
30 lurched forward and plunged over the edge of the mountain into the tempestuous sea

Once more the leaguer drew tightly round Lanka's city, within which was Ravana mourning his brother's end. Soon his mourning was increased; for his four younger sons fell, one to Angada, two to Hanuman, and one to Lakshman. Indrajit, his eldest son, skilled in magic, bade him not weep while he was still alive, and he set out to complete that in which he had once so nearly succeeded—the destruction of Rama and Lakshman. He arranged his forces and then made a sacrifice. Round the altar were placed his weapons—spear, mace, darts, bow, and sword—blood-red garments and an offering of flowers. The sacred fuel was lit and the head of a black goat was offered by Indrajit, while all watched for a sign. Suddenly a tongue of flame, red, clear and smokeless, ascended curling to the right. It was the sign of victory!

Each of the weapons was sanctified. Indrajit armed himself and hid in a cloud from which he dealt terror and death to the Vanars. Rama and Lakshman pierced by several arrows, looked in vain for their foe.

'If it is the will of the gods of war,' said Rama, 'that Indrajit should be invisible, then will we patiently abide his arrows till we fall.' And in time so it happened.

Meanwhile Hanuman, whose gift from his father was the speed of the wind and from his mother the lore of herbs and medicine, had sped away to the mountains of the north and returned laden with healing herbs. The chiefs were quickly cured of

their wounds and the two princes were made whole again. That night they made an entry into the city. The sons of Kumbha-karna opposed them, but Sugriva and his brave lieutenant accounted for them all. Indrajit, coming from more magical practices, instantly made a likeness of Sita and placed the image in his car. Before the Vanars' sight he pretended to slay her and when Hanuman informed Rama his courage failed and he fainted. Bibhishana, the Raksha ally, comforted Rama, saying, 'Fear not, Rama; this is merely delusion, for Indrajit would never slay her whom his father hopes to wed. Again Indrajit seeks his fount of magic. Command Lakshman follow and fight him before the secret rites are complete, for when once this sacrifice is ended there will be no match for him.'

Accordingly Lakshman set out under the guidance of Bibhishana, and was fortunate in arriving before the sacrifice had proceeded far. Indrajit angrily denounced the Raksha, who was his uncle, but Bibhishana replied that virtue was dearer to his heart than the sin with which Lanka was stained.

Furious taunts passed between the magician and Lakshman. Then began Indrajit's third combat. Lakshman's arrows pierced the golden mail, while his armour fell from him useless, broken by the darts of the Raksha. They bled freely, their eyes became dim with fatigue, but neither abated the conflict.

30 Soon Lakshman slew the steeds and charioteer and with a mighty, well-aimed shaft cut the magic

bow in two Lakshman fitted another dart to his bow-string and called upon the gods

'If Rama is truly righteous, let the gods help his cause'

So praying he let the arrow speed It was a victorious shot; Indrajit fell headless to the ground And this message was taken to Ravana :

'The light of Raksha hope is gone!'

XVIII.

CONQUEST OF LANKA.

*Ravana's Woe—Lakshman's Fall—Ravana's Death
—Sita's Ordeal.*

MAD with grief for his favourite son, Ravana lamented aloud and at length determined to slay Sita, saying, 'As Indrajit struck the image, so Ravana will slay the woman.' With his royal robes rent to shreds, and bearing his gleaming sword, he made his way to the garden in which Sita was imprisoned, his courtiers followed trembling. As soon as the Raksha women understood his purpose, some spark of kindness or higher duty was kindled
10 in their breasts With one accord they surrounded the object of Ravana's fury and besought him not to stain his sword with woman's blood

The courtiers then reminded the passionate king of his duty and the law laid down in holy writ respecting woman's blood. Again they bade him fight and win, to receive Sita as his lawful bride.

Though vowing black-hearted vengeance, Ravana forbore to slay Sita Hearing on all sides the wailing of bereaved women, he seized bow and dart
20 and harangued his leaders, recalling to mind all

the famous warriors who had fallen since Khara's attack on Rama in the forest From house to house the rallying call was passed, and a mighty force was speedily collected wielding maces, clubs, sabres, javelins, axes, pikes, quoits and a wonderful machine for discharging missiles, which could kill a hundred men at once

The elephant corps was formed, camels, horses and mules were arranged with their deadly burdens, and foot soldiers were arrayed in serried ranks 10 Ravana's car came forth from the city gates amidst the most terrifying omens The sun was clouded over, the birds ceased their singing, blood fell from the clouds, horses ran as if possessed by evil spirits, the banners were torn by vultures and in the distance the howling of jackals was dismally heard Ravana had gone forth to his doom

Thousands on each side were slain Sugriva and Angada distinguished themselves by brave deeds, but Ravana's deadly course was for some 20 time unchecked Marking out the radiant Lakshman beyond the throng, he recklessly drove his ponderous car in his direction with the speed of a thunder cloud blown by a summer wind Bibhishana hastened to prevent the attack and succeeded in bringing down Ravana's horses, after which he took up his position by Lakshman's side

In terrible rage Ravana leapt from his motionless car and hurled his javelin at Bibhishana Lakshman, seeing it, aimed a shaft which cleft it asunder, 30 thus saving his ally Ravana smiled a cruel smile

of vengeance and turned his attention on Lakshman. With the concentrated hate of an outraged monarch and the vengeance of a father, Ravana sped his spear. Lakshman fell stricken to the heart.

Hanuman perceived what had happened, and hurried away to the mountains of Himalaya to gather a fresh stock of healing herbs. Rama, intent on slaying the foe, arose in his might, but Ravana, being without car and steeds, fled to the refuge
10 which his city was still able to afford, not wholly on account of fear

Rama now turned to Lakshman, lamenting him for dead. The father-in-law of Sugriva came to console Rama; but ere long Hanuman returned with the salves, and owing to the ministrations of all three, Lakshman gradually regained his strength. Meanwhile, Ravana selected new horses and harnessed them to another chariot. The gods witnessed the fight of these superhuman foes; and Indra, the god
20 of war, bade his chariot driver go and pick up Rama, who till now had fought on foot. The celestial charioteer duly arrived and invested the prince with a suit of armour.

‘Mount,’ said Matah, the heavenly driver, ‘Indra bestows the golden car, and the artificer of the gods forged these weapons. I myself will drive as you direct. Mount, and hasten the doom of Ravana.’

The combat grew fiercer than ever. Arrows flew thick and each of the combatants was often wounded.
30 Ravana’s power over the gods was again attested: for he brought low the horses of Indra, and the

gods shuddered at the deed. Various forms of weapons were used in the duel but the life of each was charmed. Rama at length caused his assailant to retire with grievous wounds. In the interim the Prince of India refreshed his soul by sacrifices to the Sun, and chanted sacred verses from the scriptures

When Ravana re-appeared Rama attacked him and several times severed one of the monster's heads from his body but to no purpose, for each was as 10 quickly renewed and Ravana's strength showed no sign of abatement

And so for seven days earth and sky watched the most terrible duel that ever was fought, until Rama drew the gift of the venerable Saint Agastya, which had been forged for Indra at Brahma's behest. Generating flame and smoke as it flew from Rama's circling bow, the dart found its home deep in Ravana's heart. Ravana was dead

A loud wail arose from the Raksha ranks; a 20 tumultuous triumph was sounded by the Vanars as they pursued the enemies now broken into disorder. Blossoms were showered on the blood-stained plain from the hands of celestial dancers, and sweet music sang forth the joy of heaven. And from the highest point of heaven came a voice:

'Blest is Rama, the man who has undone the impious Ravana's boast and has rid Heaven of its foe!'

For this purpose had Rama been created from the 30 beginning.

Rama ordered the funeral pyre to be prepared. Bibhishana mourned for his brother and for the pride that had been the cause of his downfall. At first he hesitated to light the pyre of one so wicked as the dead king of Lanka had been, but Rama bade him revere the brave king who had expiated on the battle-field a life of sin and shame. Bibhishana was persuaded to perform the ceremony. A black goat was sacrificed, and as the last of the flames died away
10 Rama unstrung his bow and all thoughts of enmity were past

Next Rama anointed Bibhishana king of Lanka, a ceremony which afforded great joy to the vanquished Rakshas, and Hanuman was bidden to lead the way to Sita's wooded prison.

Sita was overjoyed at Hanuman's welcome message. She asked that Rama would come to her and proceeded to make herself ready to receive him. Rama then sent for her and they greeted one another
20 The greeting, however, was not so hearty as might have been expected, and Sita could not understand what was in Rama's mind.

He foresaw that his subjects would consider the laws of caste were broken if he took Sita back to himself after she had stayed in Ravana's palace and been polluted by the touch of the Raksha

Sita, fearing he entertained some doubts of her constancy, begged him with tearful eyes to dispel them as they were entirely unfounded. But sus-
30 picion is hard to fight against, and Sita felt it was hopeless. At last she bade Lakshman build her a

funeral pyre, saying she could not live while her honour was clouded. All the time Rama's eyes did not stir and his face betrayed no feeling, yet within he experienced sore anguish : this was Sita's terrible trial, and she elected to undergo the ordeal of fire to prove her purity or depart from a world of calumny

Lakshman. greatly agitated, built the fire of logs, and the princess of the house of Videha called upon the God of Fire, who tests and purifies all things, 10 and separates the dross from the pure : ' If my thoughts, words and deeds have been those of a faithful woman—may the Fire protect me ! If I am pure and free from sin—may the Fire protect me ! '

Boldly and proudly then the daughter of the righteous Janaka, girt in the beauty she had prepared to receive her husband, walked on and up the pyre into its hottest flames, and a thousand witnesses shook in agony as she sank and disappeared amid the red fire

XIX

THE END OF THE WANDERINGS

*The God of Fire—The Celestial Chariot—Rejoicings
in Ayodhya—The Golden Age of India.*

THE cry of the multitude was hushed as the red flames divided and a majestic form slowly rose from the pyre. It was Agni, the God of Fire, in an earthly form. Presently it was seen that he held the peerless Sita in his bosom. On her brow were the blossoms she loved to wear; not one was withered by the heat. Her mantle, worked in gold and silver threads, shone without the least sign of tarnish from the smoke. Of her long tresses not so much
10 as a hair was disarranged. The God of Fire had protected her from the flames.

Agni bade Rama receive back his wife:

‘Rama, take again thy sinless Sita. Though ravished from thy side and tempted by the impious Ravana and his Raksha guardians, she had been constant to thee in thought, word and deed. I am all-seeing, and this is my command.’

Immediately Rama’s eyes brightened: a great anxiety had passed from his mind.

20 ‘Never,’ said he, ‘did I doubt Sita’s faithfulness

I know her oaths are fixed, as the God of Fire himself is witness. Now the whole world must believe in her virtue, and I call all to witness that Rama will love Sita as long as life shall last.

Rama, gratified that the world would esteem his wife for her goodness, sought forgiveness for his seeming doubt. Sita, happy in her rescue, freely forgave him, and with tears of joy they embraced.

Many of the gods had assembled, for they were 10 amazed at Rama's treatment of Sita; but on hearing his words, how he had allowed Sita to undergo the ordeal in order to protect her innocence from the calumny of evil people, they approved, and blessed the royal pair. But the wonders were not yet ended. The great god, Siva, next appeared, and in his chariot was the form of Dasa-ratha. The sire greeted his children and bade Rama return to his kingdom. 'Thy fourteen years of exile are done and Kausalya longs to embrace thee' 20

As the embers of the pyre smouldered, Bibhishana brought forth and gave to Rama the great car which Ravana had taken from one of the gods. It was large enough to consist of several compartments, each beautifully decorated. Drawn by swans, it could fly through the air at the will of the driver. This, he proposed, should be the vehicle to convey Ayodhya's king and queen to their city.

Sita, wishing to honour the Vanars, asked that they might be present at the coronation, and accordingly 30 they were allowed to follow. Rama and Sita were

accompanied in the car by Sugriva, Bibhishana, and of course Lakshman

Hanuman, however, set out first with the glad tidings to Bharat at Ayodhya. Rama related to Sita his adventures since their unhappy separation, showing her the places as they passed over them in their aerial flight. First the battle-field, the rock from which Kumbha-karna fell; the ocean and 'Rama's Bridge'; the Vanar fastness of Kish-
10 kindha, where Rama slew Bali and restored Sugriva's throne and wife; the lake, by the shores of which he first met Hanuman; the forest where the Raksha vulture, Jatayu, fought to hinder Ravana; the forest cottage built by Lakshman, from which Sita was borne by the Demon in Brahman disguise.

The terrors of these places were lost in the present happiness of the pair and their faithful brother. With unalloyed pleasure they saw once more Saint Agastya's hermitage and the Peak of Beauty, to
20 which Bharat had followed them. Next the river Jumna came into sight, and they recalled with gratitude the help of King Guha, who had ferried them across the Ganges, and Sita had not forgotten the vows she made while crossing the mighty streams.

Meanwhile, Hanuman had arrived, and Bharat, overjoyed at the welcome news, had instructed his officers to restore the order and beauty of the city. Minstrels chanting the national songs lined the streets. Warriors were placed as guards of
30 honour to receive the expected guests. Prince Satrugna issued directions concerning the pre-

paration of the city. Its streets were levelled, swept, watered and strewn with parched rice; flags were unfurled on every turret and pinnacle, and the houses and streets were decorated with festoons of flowering plants

The corps of war-elephants and chariots were speedily decked in gay ornaments and the army marched forth to meet the monarch Queen Kausalya, attended by maids of honour, was carried in a litter, and second came Queen Sumitra, to greet 10 their sons Brahman followed blessing the victors, then came merchants, warriors, and tradesmen

Surrounded by chiefs and bards, Bharat carried the sandals which he had carefully preserved as the sign of Rama's kingship

Thus the joyful procession went to meet the returning exiles In the heavens they saw the approaching car and ten thousand voices cried the welcome name of Rama, at whose direction the car gently descended Bharat mounted and the two 20 brothers embraced, after which he was presented to Sita, Lakshman and the two kingly guests, Bibhis-hana and Sugriva

Kneeling before Rama, Bharat now placed at his feet the sandals which he begged in the forest as a token, and said, 'Faithfully have I ruled for thee, and these, not I, have occupied the throne Take it thyself now, and live to rule thy loyal subjects in peace and prosperity as Dasa-ratha did of old'

The Queens lovingly greeted Sita and their sons, 30 after which the cortège entered the city amid the

gayest rejoicings As soon as possible Rama and Sita were consecrated anew and crowned by the Saint, Vasishtha Bharat and Lakshman performed portions of the ceremonies, Satrughna held the white umbrella, one of the royal insignia, while Sugriva and Bibhishana waved the fan-like shades over the King and Queen.

Rama restored the aerial car to its heavenly owner The god of the wind, Hanuman's father, 10 gave to Rama a golden wreath of lotuses, while Indra presented him with a wreath of pearls

Rich gifts were bestowed on the allies, Bibhishana, Sugriva and Hanuman, after which they departed to their own realms.

So began the long and prosperous reign of Rama and Sita, which the bards agree in recording as the golden age of Ayodhya, for they say :

Untimely death visited not the subjects of Rama, they enjoyed freedom from disease, women bewailed 20 no husbands or children lost No robbers, cheats, or false dealers were found throughout the length and breadth of the land, for each man loved his neighbour as himself Trees yielded their fruit as each season came, harvests never failed to fill the granaries to overflowing, and the people were happy in their labour.

Rama and Sita reigned together very many years, and after them their sons became the founders of mighty empires.

GLOSSARY.

a usually pronounced as in wall

ai as in aisle

au as ou in house

e as a in rare

i as in lily and in police

u as in bull and in rude

h in combination with **t** does not affect the consonant **Manthara**
is sounded as **Mantara**

s is often modified into **sh**

ablutions . holy washings

anchorite (4 17), hermit, recluse

auspicious (14 9) Eastern rulers believed there was one instant
most favourable to any business they undertook As in
23 15 the astrologers calculated the time, which was then
observed with the utmost precision

bark-clothes. It is recommended that the reader should visit
the ethnographical section of a museum in connection with
the facts regarding social life and customs mentioned in
"Rama "

battalion (86 30), at least 300

Brahma, Vishnu and Siva The Hindu Triad i.e. the three
chief gods *Brahma* (2 14) the creator; *Vishnu* (Intro
duction) the preserver; *Siva* (103 16) the destroyer and
regenerator

Brahmans (2. 17) The four castes or divisions of society are
enumerated on p 2 The Brahmans were the chief of all
created beings to be treated with more respect than kings,
who were to be advised by Brahmans The interpretation
of the laws is expressly confined to this caste

Cathay China

castes (2 26) See Brahman The code of laws bearing the name of *Manu* described the four castes beside the Brahmins, were the military, the industrial, and the servile As time went on, very sharp distinctions were made between the castes, but it is considered that at no time was the lot of the labourer worse than that of the villein of the middle ages

coins (2 5) A fact pointing to the existence of money and a system of coinage in this early period and see 2 24

compel the curve (9. 1), bend the bow

crooked (25 16), Manthara was malformed

Demons (4. 20), *Genu* In Hindu myth evil spirits are called Rakshas They have powers of changing their shapes and eternal enmity existed between them and the gods In the text the meditations of the Brahmins were frequently interrupted by petty annoyances due to Demons The Vedas, or scriptures, it was enjoined, must be read aloud, distinctly, with a calm mind and in a respectful posture The reading must instantly cease on the occurrence of the following circumstances wind, rain, thunder, earthquake, meteor, eclipse, howling of beasts, which were omens, and also during the sound of a lute, an arrow, and strange terrors It was, therefore, easily possible for a Demon to add centuries of penance to the periods of probation served by the anchorites

elephant corps (13 12) An elephant carried a stout box-like structure accommodating about twenty-five fully armed warriors

groves (46 4) In recent years an example of such a grove, containing shrines in sheltered spots, has been realised in "The Peace Garden" at the White City, London

Kosala is now the province of Oudh

leviathans (83 3), sea-monsters, possibly sharks in reality

lotus (51 4) A name for the water-lily of the Ganges and of the Nile, but also vaguely applied to many plants in mythology As a term of comparison it signifies great beauty. As a food the lotus of tradition robbed its eaters of memory, determination and activity.

Manu (1 12) is regarded as the progenitor of mankind

mists of time (2 31), Hindu mythology claims traditions nearly four million years old

mobilise (76 1), assemble troops and set them in motion.

Om (18 18), see under Twice born.

pellucid (1 16), allowing light to penetrate, clear

pyre (39 30), fuel arranged for the consuming of a dead body ,
hence its connection with Sita's ordeal

reverberated (9 29), re-echoed

Sandal-wood (74 11), fragrant wood of an Asiatic tree from which
an essence for a pomade was extracted

Siva See under Brahma

Sudras (2 25), regarded as the aborigines of India who were
enslaved by invaders

Twice-born (2 14) The religious ceremony of investing with
the sacred thread must not be delayed beyond sixteen for a
Brahman, or twenty-four for a merchant This "second
birth" confers on the three classes who are admitted to it
the title of "twice-born men" The persons invested are
taught the mysterious word Om, and the most holy verse of
the Vedas These, joined to universal benevolence, may
raise a man to beatitude without the aid of any other
religious exercise

Vanars The allies of Rama monkeys the hill-tribesmen

Vedic lore Many learned Hindus accepted three Vedas as
scriptures, while a fourth deals with popular superstitions
The Vedas are among the oldest books in the world
Examples of Vedic rites are given in the text, with con-
siderable detail, throwing light on the social circumstances
of the period

Videha is now the province of North Berar

Vishnu. See under Brahma and The Introduction

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS AND SUBJECTS FOR ESSAYS AND RESEARCH.

1 The supposed journey of Rama is well known in India to this day, and is annually traversed by thousands of devoted pilgrims (*R. C. Dutt*) Trace the route on a map, using the references in the text and Glossary

2 Queen Kaikeyi had won promises of two boons from Dasa-ratha Construct the scene to which Kaikeyi refers in chapter VI

3 Do you consider Dasa-ratha somewhat prone to grant indefinite boons? Collect instances and, if you can, enumerate similar rash promises on the part of other personages in literature, showing the result in each case

4 Put into dialogue the speeches of Rama and Lakshman which are suggested on page 31 10-18

5 Kaikeyi disappears from the story at the seventh chapter. Write an account of her end as you imagine it

6 The birds and forest beasts are said to have been affected variously by the influence of Rama and that of Ravana Assuming this, write your impressions as a bird or beast when in the vicinity of these superhuman beings

7 As Sita in the hut of the votaress, page 44 21-27, give a detailed account of your life

8 Give the vulture's account of the Abduction of Sita (Ch XII.)

9 Present the story of Rama as you imagine Hanuman sang it to the despairing Sita

10. Compare Hanuman with Lakshman as a man of action

11 Write a humorous account of the rousing of Khumbakarna, from the point of view of the "gentleman in waiting"

12 Mention, with brief descriptions, some "wonderful machines for discharging missiles," of prehistorical and mediaeval times.

QUESTIONS AND SUBJECTS FOR ESSAYS 111

13 Find parallel passages to the descriptions of single combats between Rama, Ravana and others

14 What is Rama's Bridge?

15. Rama is the Hindu ideal of certain manly virtues Which are they? Attest your choice by examples from the text

16 Why is Sita, similarly, the ideal woman of the Hindu?

17 A recent work on ancient India says that commerce was considerable, and quotes as evidence a line in Rama-yana, relating to the triumphal entry of Rama — "All the men of distinction, the merchants, and the chief men of the people went out to meet him"

Using the text as a source of history, make statements, and attest them by quotations, concerning

(a) the high position of merchants,

(b) the circulation of gold coinage,

(c) the use of intoxicants;

(d) the use of pomades;

(e) the selection and development of the site of Allahabad;

(f) laws of succession

18 Define the words —adept (p 2), propitiate (3), molestation (3), austerity (4), obeisance (11), acquiescence (11), abash (12), reciprocate (14)

19 Give the meaning and derivation of —cavalcade (12), cortège (13), isolated (15) auspicious (14), angury (29), vigil (31), pellucid (32), homage (45), metamorphosis (78)

20 Substitute more ordinary words for —anchorite (35), doughty (82), leaguer (93), lore (93) What is the advantage of using the rarer word?

SUBJECTS FOR COMPOSITION IN VERSE.

1 The exiles arrive at the Ganges (p 34)

2 Dasa-ratha's slaying of the youth (p 39)

3 Agastya's gifts to Rama (p 46)

4 The death of the Vulture (p 62)

5 Ravana goes out to battle (p 97)

6 The death of Ravana (p 99)

HELPS TO FURTHER STUDY.

1. *Ramayana* has several times been translated into English. In 1870-75 R. T. H. Griffith published a free translation in 5 vols. Romesh C. Dutt gave a verse rendering in 1899, and Messrs. Dent's edition in their *Everyman's Library* is very accessible. It is also provided with explanatory essays.

The *Ramayana* is mentioned as one of Lord Avebury's "Hundred Best Books."

2. Essays on the subject and condensed versions occur in Sir Monier Williams' "Indian Epic Poetry," 1863, J. T. Wheeler's "History of India," 1867; J. C. Oman's "Struggles of the Dawn, etc.," 1863, and "The Great Indian Epics," 1894. The "Encyclopaedia Britannica" gives a concise summary, as does "The World's Great Books" (Harmsworth).

The latter work also furnishes a glimpse at the various Vedas.

3. "Stories of Indian Gods and Heroes," by W. D. Munro, Harrap, 1912, besides other myths deals with Rama, and the same publishers issue a larger work by Dr. Coomaraswamy.

4. "A Dictionary of Non-Classical Mythology," by Marian Edwardes and Lewis Spence (Dent), will be useful for reference.

5. The "Historians' History of the World," 1908, volume II, contains much of interest to the student of Ancient Indian topics, having chapters on Indian History—Legend and Reality, Manners and Customs of the Ancient Hindus, Brahmanism, as well as a map of Ancient India.

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